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## The Snob Splendid

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—AN INTERNATIONAL ROMANCE OF  
THE MENDOCINO MOUNTAINS

By Alice Rix

Author of "The Wife That Wasn't," "The Big Noise at Nice," etc.

CAREW DRUMMOND stepped from the train at Battle Station, in the Bald Hills, Mendocino County, California. Staged for him were the great spaces—the redwoods marching up the mountain, the plunge of the gorge upon the torrent, the wild escape of the waters, the divine mystery of shadowed cañon, the breathless glory of lighted peak; and away to the west, like horsemen from the sky, the three Battles racing to meet him, out of the setting sun.

Mr. Drummond put down two portman-teaus of ancient cowhide, lighted himself a cigarette, and looked fractiously at his boots. He had traveled up from Ukiah with a raving native of "God's country," and was sated with the wonders of the Golden West.

"Say, son! You're a Britisher, ain't you?" this sickening beast had brayed

across the railway carriage, and had proceeded to hammer forcibly through the frozen reserve that Mr. Drummond had kept inviolate ever since he left Liverpool.

If you asked him, at this minute, the great West swaggered. It got up and hit you in the eye. It rubbed in the "only man is vile" idea. It tried to make you out a worm.

Besides, as he tried to make the chap on the train see, nowadays, when you came out to this country, you didn't get the surprise of your life. With all this "Put the World Before You" stuff about, you got the West, now, in the pictures.

Mr. Drummond had had the world put before him by the inquisitive traveling cinema which discovered his native village. Its expiring effort had been a Wild West film; so he had got the Battles in the pictures with all the rest.

He was in California as the stranger guest of old Battle, who had figured romantically in his father's youth, had since made a colossal fortune in timber, and had recently invited the son of his friend to "come out West and sprout a new pair of lungs." So here was Carew Drummond—with nothing radically wrong with his lungs—waiting to meet the Battles off the screen.

It restored his naturally sunny temper to see them running to form—ab-so-lutely it! They came hurricane-riding down hill, running the horses right up to the station steps, piling them up on their haunches out of the gallop. The girl—pretty, my word!—stood up in the stirrups. The two loose-jointed, mighty men flung themselves headlong out of the big Mexican saddles.

Drummond took off his cap in the grand manner. His big traveling coat was kind to his weedy length. The rough tweeds and high boots helped out his legs. The red, red sun warmed his cool eyes, his pale hair, and the odd texture of his skin, like bleached and rough-dried linen. His features were good and his smile engaging. Cynthia Battle thought he looked likable.

"Spare us 'the line of Battle,' Mr. Drummond, *won't* you? We're positive martyrs to it! Everybody we come down to meet says it to us—or else 'drawn up in Battle array,' if you were thinking of that."

"Well, I wasn't—really, you know," stammered Drummond, the shorn speech of the woolly Miss Battle falling on the grand manner like a blight.

He colored furiously over what he *had* been thinking, so that his light eyebrows shone against the redness above his startled eyes like silver crescents. Perceiving that her hand had been held out to him, he cast himself suddenly upon it and dropped his cap.

Miss Battle's dancing mare recoiled showily from the cap on two feet. The little fringed gauntlet abruptly soared, and Mr. Drummond, feeling extremely foolish, clawed at space.

"Sorry, but don't waste a courtly gesture on the desert air," called Miss Battle from on high. "You can use it on father."

Old Battle, grizzled, gaunt, wind-beaten, sun-dried, like an ancient pine, and full of Western breeze, bounced reassuringly into the scale and restored his guest's balance.

"Well, well, well, well, *well*, Caroo! So you got all the way out here to us! Well,

I'm real pleased to see you, my boy! You see, I'm starting in right now to call you by your front name—Caroo. I guess I'd kind o' balk at 'mistering' your father's son."

Drummond's "Thanks awfully" sprayed coolly over this husky warmth.

"It's very good of you, I'm sure, Mr. Battle," he added. "My name's pronounced 'Cary.' The 'w,' you know—it's not sounded."

"Ca-ree? Well, I *didn't* know—that's a fact! You see, Carree, I only heard it written." Old Battle gave a great laugh, rich and sweet as maple sirup, to this small joke. "The 'w' don't do any work? Don't count, hey?"

"Oh, don't make that mistake, Mr. Battle!" laughed Drummond, too anxious to correct it to be aware of young Battle's approach. "It counts for rather a lot when it *don't* work, as you say. You see, my mother is one of the old Carew family—the only Carews in England who don't sound the 'w' in the name."

"Is that a fact? Well, now, that's vurry interesting," said old Battle, grave as an owl.

"And, you see, the 'Caroos,' as they call themselves," pursued Mr. Drummond informatively, "are really not connected with our people at all."

"Is—that—so? Not your folks at all?" Old Battle's eyebrows went up under his hat. "Well, Carree, my mistake again! I guess you got to excuse us some out here."

"Oh, don't mention it, Mr. Battle. Quite excusable, I'm sure."

"You're turning father's head, Mr. Drummond! He isn't used to having this flattering attention paid to his mistakes. He'll be trying to show off now." Miss Battle's voice came like three little cracks of a whip. "Please notice Bart! He's got your cap, and tears in his eyes—haven't you, Bart?"

She waltzed the dancing mare brilliantly against the giant young Battle, and crowded him up.

"This is my brother, Bartholomy," she said blandly, smiling into Drummond's scarlet face. "He's the only one on earth who does not sound the 'w' in the name. And my name is—"

"Cynthy!"

"Thank you, father! Cynthy, Mr. Drummond. The 'a'—"

"Cynthiar!"



"Is sometimes sounded," finished Miss Battle hurriedly. "Yes, father?"

"Keep some of that mare's feet on the earth. She'd like to stand, if you'd quit trying to show off!"

Miss Battle wheeled at the word of command, and removed her own scarlet face from Drummond's glad gaze. "Quits!" was written all over him. He accepted his cap from young Battle with a broad smile, and settled it on a contented mind.

"Glad you could come, Drummond," said young Battle, also broadly smiling. "Hope you'll like us. Well, father, shall we make a start? I've got a horse here with an English saddle, Drummond—or I'll take you up on the buckboard."

"Oh, ride—rather! I say, what horses you've got out here!" cried Carew Drummond, as Bart flung up his hand and a couple of Indians slipped from the shadow of the station, with a rakish gray between the shafts of the buckboard, and a fiery chestnut under the English saddle.

Drummond tore off the big coat, let it lie where it fell, and jumped lightly off the platform after Bart. He pushed back his cap and stood horsily on straddled legs, looking the chestnut over.

Cynthia, her mare standing like a sheep, watched him hopefully. She wanted most awfully to see that victorious smile of Carew Drummond's in the dust.

"I guess you can manage him, all right," said Bart, standing by.

Then behold! He was up as the Indian dropped from the saddle—off again, to lengthen the stirrups and give a workman-like cinch to the girth—running an accomplished hand over the quivering flanks, down the restless legs—wheedling, gentling, winning over.

The chestnut lowered his suspicious head and stretched his muzzle. His wide nostrils breathed out over strange tweeds and accepted their friendly flavor. Mr. Drummond's was the way of a man with a horse.

Miss Battle fell in sulkily beside her father.

"Here, Tony, get this coat on the wagon! All right, Bart! We'll catch up. Now, my girl!"

"He was as rude and sneering as anything to you, father!" she burst out stormily. "What difference did it make about his old name—just at first, anyway? And you just let him go on snubbing you!"

"I guess I ain't taking any snubbing,"

interrupted old Battle, with dignity. "I guess I got sense enough to study folks some afore I get hot under the collar with 'em. That boy was just talking natural. You wait till I get through!" he added, as his daughter gave a scornful snort. "That boy's folks is some potatoes in a little old country where folks' names, and how they say 'em and spell 'em, look bigger against the sky than they do on the horizon of this map of the U. S. A. He's been raised with his eyes fixed on 'em, and—"

"Father, I've met some lovely English people—just as good families as his—and they don't all begin telling you about it the minute they get their eyes on you. I think he talked like a perfect fool!"

"That ain't what I'm getting at. What I'm getting at is, I got no call to get riled with him," persisted old Battle. "He's young—no more'n nineteen or twenty—and he ain't never been out of his own back yard. He's just naturally going to think it's bigger'n it is, till he finds some of the world living comfortable outside his fence. You can't make a newborn pussycat see any quicker by prizing its eyes open, but you can make it unhappy some, trying. Now you don't want to start making your visitor unhappy, Cynthia. It ain't good manners!"

"He isn't my visitor, thank you, father! I shan't interfere with him on the ranch. He can be as happy as he likes"—Miss Battle cackled viciously—"teaching the Indians how to pronounce his name. He'll love that! You needn't glare at me, father! I'll be polite."

Old Battle, turned around square in his saddle, continued to look fixedly at his defiant daughter.

"I guess I been figuring on you wanting to be something more'n *polite* to that boy, Cynthia. I guess I been figuring some on you remembering it was his father jumped into the Columbia River rapids, with his boots on, to pull your father out, with the logs smashing out the boom and battering down like kingdom come, so's it looked as if we wouldn't either of us get the chance to live long enough to get drowned."

"He isn't his father!" flared Cynthia defensively. "I can't feel—"

"You just hold your hosses till I tell you how I feel—and I'm real sorry I got to tell you, Cynthia. I'm feeling deep about having that boy out here on my ranch. I don't know as all my money ever seemed

so good to me as when his father wrote me he was real worried about his boy's lungs not shaping right in them fogs of theirs, and I see I could help some. They ain't rich folks, and I was real pleased figuring how I could work things so's they'd think he was traveling on a pass from the time he stepped off at Liverpool. I been figuring real joyful on having him out here on my ranch, soaking up sunshine and ozone and redwoods smell, and riding my hosses, and running hogs in my woods, and on its being *me* getting him strong for his father. For thirty years I been praying to Almighty God for the chance to get square with his father. I got a kind of holy feeling, now, about its being took notice of. I'm feeling real disappointed and lonesome finding out my daughter don't—"

"Oh, father, I'm sorry! I didn't—you know I wouldn't—I just—"

"Come, you got no call to cry, Cynthy. Come, Cynthy, you don't want to cry. See, here's the boys just on top. You don't want 'em to turn around and see you cry. Come, my bird! Hold your head up! Father knows. You're going to be father's girl, now, ain't—"

As old Battle leaned from his saddle to put a tender hand under his girl's chin, the mare's head came back like a stone hammer. Old Battle, with his arm knocked nearly out of its socket, pitched into his seat and jumped his horse across the road, as the mare reared; to save his head from her battering forefeet.

Old Battle was a horror to the mare. She hated him, though she had forgotten why. She had forgotten the joy of the wild, free range, and the first bitter insult of rope and bridle—the cruel surprise of a pull on her tender mouth and a maddening weight on her back that could not be flung, stamped, kicked, bucked, or bitten off.

She had forgotten this, but she remembered the smell of old Battle. All the proud grief and rage and fierce revolt of her breaking survived in that execrated essence. She meant to beat him down, trample him, *kill* him—when she could. Having missed a chance, this time, finding her tongue free, she clamped on the bit, leaped her length in the air, and fled from the hated sight, sound, and smell of him in a fury of frenzied hoofs.

"Varmint!" muttered old Battle, and put spurs to his horse. He had no fear for Cynthia, but he shouted up the mountain:

"Pass 'em on the inside, Cynthy!"—for the boys were just on top.

Just on top, the road thrust a sharp, crooked elbow out into the blue and vanished around a shoulder of the mountain, shrinking between sheer, towering rock and stark drop to the cañon.

Here, out of nowhere, big against the sky, started up the clumsy figure of a squaw, with her papoose strapped to the board on her back, and a bulky load of telescoped baskets flip-flapping from her shoulder. The startled horses plunged and sidled across the road.

"Oh, Almighty God!" sobbed old Battle, as the squaw passed on the inside, with her flopping load straight in the eyes of the frantic mare.

In searing flashes, he saw the mare shy, stiff-legged, out of her gallop, and her wild hoofs snatch at the brink of the gorge. He saw his girl hung out over the stark drop—the frightened chestnut crowding Bart's pinto, as the mare scraped his flank—the pinto's lashing heels—the mare boring on the outside, clawing like a cat in the loose dust, and slipping off the edge of the road. He saw her body hurling itself into space, and then recoil as from a stone wall. He saw her hind hoofs beat on air, as she cramped the sharp turn—girl, men, horses, tossing a huddle against the sky, and then swallowed up by the rock.

## II

OLD Battle took off his hat and wiped the sweat of fear from his face.

"How!" grunted the squaw, slumping stolidly downhill.

"How, durn ye!" returned old Battle, and shook his hat savagely in her shoe-button eyes.

After winding around the rocky shoulder, the road plunged steeply to a wide bottom and climbed again like a leaning wall.

Drummond, deathly white and sick, dug in the spurs and sped the chestnut after the mare—holding hard with his knees in the unhelpful English saddle.

"She's running away! Your sister will be thrown! That mare's running away with her!" he gasped, without turning his head, as Bart ran the pinto in beside him.

"Well, there's nothing in the Hills to catch her if she is," grinned Bart, highly diverted by this gallant spurt, but respecting his guest for it, all the same. "Nothing to worry about now," he went on.

"Cynthia'll stick on, all right—if she isn't doing it on purpose," he added cynically.

Drummond kicked in the spurs, worked out on the chestnut's withers, and put his horse out across the wide bottom without a word. His jaw was hard set, his eyes were strained on a dust cloud whirling up the mountain like a tornado.

The pinto's wild blood tingled to the race. The two hard-trained, mountain-bred horses took the stiff grade as birds fly upward. Trees and rocks rushed by, scurrying downhill. A stream, leaping to a pool, flashed out a spear thrust from the brush. Dust rolled up like yellow fog.

Halfway up, Drummond pulled in.

"She's all right now. She's taking it out of her with this hill. She's all right now!"

He patted the chestnut's neck and settled into his saddle, the sweat pouring down his dusty face. Bart, looking at him queerly, silently passed him a cigarette.

"Thanks awfully!" said the young Englishman. "I will in a minute. Made me a bit sick up there. I expected to see—"

"I know," said Bart hastily. It had made him a bit sick, too. "But my sister was—"

"Oh, she was splendid! Most girls, you know, would have tumbled off from sheer funk!"

Drummond's voice thrilled. He worshiped good horsemanship and good nerve, and he bore Miss Battle no malice for his lashing. She had got one herself—hated it like poison, too. He laughed and forgot it.

Not so Cynthia Battle, as she breathed the chastened mare by the corduroy bridge that bordered another death drop. She nursed a grievance as big as the Bald Hills against Carew Drummond. He had laughed at her, and ridicule was Miss Battle's black beast. Carew Drummond had *laughed at her!* And after that she had to be nice to him or hurt her father! *Nice* to him!

Into this tender mood clattered Drummond, with tactful greeting.

"I say, you know, really, Miss Battle! Too bad of you to show off like that! You put me in a blue funk. I thought, you know, you were being run away with."

"Did you?" asked Cynthia, with great restraint, and privately hammering out another nail for his early coffin.

"Say!" called Bart, coming up with his cheerful grin. "Drummond's been risking his life trying to stop the mare."

"Really, Mr. Drummond?"

She laughed, throwing her head back to the sun and looking down on him out of the sunglow. There was warmth in all Cynthia's brownness. There was warmth in her apricot bloom, in her coppery hair and liquid eyes—dappled brown, like trout pools with the sun slanting across them. There was warmth in her mouth—pomegranate red, a little pouting. The burning ghost of old Spain, which walks in California, touched her young grace with its strange allure of fire and languor.

Drummond flushed ingenuously. He thought her lovely.

Lovely she was, and she knew all about it—the rich old Battle's daughter, courted, flattered, spoiled—a vain young wretch!

"I thought I was going to be 'Carew' to everybody," he said eagerly. "I wish you would, Miss Battle!"

"I'll think about it—*Carew*," she replied, giving him a poisoned sweet of a smile. *Nice* to him! "Here's father. Bart, I bet you five cents he shoots the mare!"

"I'm going to shoot that mean critter, my girl!" threatened old Battle, across the bridge. "Ain't nothing to laugh at," he added, as a shout went up. "I'm not going to see you killed to please any fool hoss. Well, Caree, my boy, you're home. Yonder's the shack!"

At the summit of the Bald Hills the Battle shack stretched spaciouly under its wide redwood shakes and its rough stone chimneys. It looked to the west, across half a dozen sister ranges, to watch the sun drop into the Pacific.

The untamed wilderness came, friendly, about it—tan oak, scattering wealth of golden acorns; madroña and manzanita, writhing trunks and branches like blood-red snakes; green huddle of brush and scrub and fern; far-flung mountain creeper; wild, sweet grasses. Around it were monster spurs of gray and brown and purple rock; wide gulches where the redwood needles made fragrant, russet beds; the loud hurry of great waters; the deep pause of springs; the matchless beauty of the California mountains, sentineled by unnumbered hosts of redwoods, with their spears set in the skies.

Old Battle fussed happily about his guest.

"I guess you'd like a drink and a wash as soon as you could get 'em, Caree. Which you feel you'd like first, my boy?"



"If you show me the bath first, I'll drink it," replied Drummond, beating the yellow dust from his cap.

His tweeds were a patternless yellow, and yellow dust lay thick on his lashes, choking his nostrils and throat. As he sipped something long and cold from a mint-plumed tumbler, he hoped that the bath would come along all right. He found it—sunk in the floor, big enough to take a stroke in. It was built of some unfamiliar white wood, hard as iron, smooth as glass. It was supplied with an alarming rush of scalding water and a stream of cold copious enough to put out a fire. My word!

He splashed contentedly, shaved, got into flannels, and appeared for tea, looking very distinguished and feeling at peace with a surprising world.

Cynthia, a bright flame in orange muslin, hailed him from the big round table built on a redwood stump in the shade beside the shack. A broad circular seat embraced the big table. Outside the seat there was room for four to walk abreast.

"How jolly! May I come up and sit by you, Miss Battle?" he asked, running eagerly up the steps.

"You may, Mr. Drummond."

"Oh, wouldn't you mind? Thanks awfully—Cynthia!"

Flushing with pleasure, the victim seated himself beside her and watched, with already infatuated eyes, her slender brown fingers moving among the tea things.

"China or Ceylon, Carew?"

"Oh! China tea, please." His amazement at finding it flowing in the wilderness, his surprised stare at the sophisticated sliced lemon, were as candid as if he had asked aloud how such things could be. Cynthia longed to scald him from the teapot. So he took them for savages!

"May I have one of those little yellow scones?"

"Corn bread, my boy!" Old Battle passed the plate. "That's the stuff to put meat on your bones!"

"Keep off, Carew," warned Bart. "It's a crank notion of father's—deadly stuff with tea!"

Drummond thought it would be deadly stuff with anything as he painfully disposed of his one rash bite; but there was other bread delectable—butter as sweet as cream—cream as thick as butter—berries as big as plums—wild honey of heavenly flavor.

"I guess it's more habit than notion,"

admitted old Battle. "I was raised on it, Carew—nothing much else, and, most times, not enough of that!"

He gave his big maple sirup laugh.

"Oh, really!" murmured Drummond uncomfortably.

"That's when I worked, some, for old Allan's folks, instead of him working for mine," expanded vulgar old Battle. "Ain't that so, Allan?" He genially prodded the wrinkled half-breed arriving with relays. "Many's the time I helped his mother at pounding up corn, Carew, so as to get an invite to supper!"

"You're too harrowing, father! Carew's crying into his tea," said Cynthia maliciously, watching Drummond's shocked face bent over his cup.

"Well, well! Plenty of corn bread now, folks! Help yourself, Carew."

It was not old Battle's early poverty, but his beastly form, that outraged Mr. Drummond. His own long-impoorished family ignored their painful circumstances before guests, and took their thin bread and scrape and inferior tea from an ancient servitor as inanimate, for them, as his tray. Fancy his father addressing a remark, from the table, to old Higgins, and actually poking him in the back as he passed around it!

Rotten for the young Battles, he thought. Stunning girl like Cynthia—brother a presentable chap, too—got it from the mother, probably.

This theory exploded with a bang when old Battle showed him a photograph.

"That's Cynthia's mother."

Drummond looked at it respectfully.

"Was your wife American, Mr. Battle?" he asked.

"She was a maverick," replied old Battle. Drummond, who had never heard the word, thought, with a gulp of horror, that it was the name of some native tribe, until the old man added: "Kind o' Spanish, I guess. She strayed into camp after one of the big fires up in the North Forest, and one of the boys took her home to his wife to nuss. No bigger'n a grasshopper, she warn't, and she couldn't tell nothing about her folks."

Drummond thought that the quick leap of the young Battles away from such beginnings must be the greatest wonder of the West. That it might have carried them, in point of culture, as far as he had gone himself, never crossed his mind.

They had been at school, he learned, in



the West. They had never even visited New York. Drummond believed that all the culture in the whole United States of America was manifested in New York, and dwindled westward on its way to disappear. As soon as Cynthia's malicious humor pounced on this conviction, she said and did everything she could think of to cement it into his brain.

Other things helped. The ranch in the Bald Hills was the Battles' back yard, as it were. They went out there to play, and left conventions in their San Francisco home. The shack was furnished with rude comfort—except for a piano and the surprising bath—and staffed by Indians and half-breeds, who wandered about informally in jeans, on terms of brotherhood with old Battle, and calling his children by their baptismal names. Drummond, to his furious offense, became "Carry" to these privileged servitors.

The young Battles read little in the mountains. They were scarcely ever out of the saddle; and Cynthia carried off her music to her own room after Drummond asked her if she had ever heard a Gilbert and Sullivan opera.

"No—whose did you say?" she inquired, keeping her eyes nailed away from Bart's.

When Drummond told them that he had brought out some of the music with him, they thought it too good to be true. Both these wealthy, wide-awake, cultivated young Westerners were pitilessly amused by the incredibly limited vistas of their well bred English guest.

Poor Drummond would have been just as funny in England. He came from one of those remote little villages that are to be found in certain corners of that country, off the rail, off the track of the *char-à-bancs*, off the map of the world. His family had been buried alive in it for generations—intensively cultivating their pride of blood, and the disdainful ignorance of new peoples of which they were almost equally proud.

Pride and poverty had kept him away from schools and from social experience. From his father he had acquired little except a knowledge of horses and reminiscences of a youthful trip to the States, where the elder Drummond had met old Battle. He had taught himself to sing and play delightfully by the grace of God, and had got his slang from the letters of cousins at college. The rest of his education was

the dark deed of a curate escaped from the Middle Ages.

The end of his first evening at the Battle shack found him at the piano before a thumbled score of "The Mikado."

"This is the stuff I was telling you about, Cynthia. Can you read music? Try this. I'll play the melody—I can't get up on those notes. Try this bit."

"We are not shy, the moon and I," warbled Cynthia. "We're very wide awake—"

Bart choked and fled, and she broke down hysterically.

"It's a bit tricky, but you'll get it. I say, you've got a voice, you know! I heard some of your American music on the ship."

He ran his long, fine hands over the keys, in and out of ragtime melodies, improvising on the themes, wandering into themes of his own, plaintive, tender. All the time his dreamy eyes were on Cynthia Battle.

Then old Battle, who was delighted with him, put him, almost personally, to bed.

Cynthia lifted her face from the fur on the couch as Bart came in.

"We-e-ll! Would you be-lieve it? Where has he *been*?"

"He hasn't been—that's it," grinned Bart. "Think of finding 'em alive like that! Say, I wouldn't have had your job to-night for a farm!"

"I liked it," Cynthia said cruelly. "I've got a lovely idea, Bart. Let's rake a crowd together and get up a 'Mikado' show!"

"What for?"

"Let's get them up here and give it, costumes and all!"

"What for?"

"Oh, don't be so stupid! For a joke, of course. Now don't ask on whom, for goodness' sake! If you can't guess—on Mr. Carrew Drummond!"

"If you ask me," said Bart, "I think it's a low-down trick—getting people up here to laugh at him and make the fellow uncomfortable."

"He doesn't laugh and make people uncomfortable, *does* he?" flared Cynthia in a fury—"I can't stand him!"

"Oh, come off! I know what got your goat." Bart winked a brotherly wink.

"Let the fellow alone, Cynthia!"

"I believe you *like* him, Bart Battle!"

"I've seen worse," Bart replied coolly.

"He'll be all right when he finds out where he's at."

"Well, I'm going to lead him to it!" announced Miss Battle darkly. She paused

at the door. "Bart, if you give me away to father, I'll—"

The door banged.

### III

AN Indian whipped down the mountain, before the sun was up, to catch the mail with a letter from Miss Battle to her dearest friend, in San Francisco. It detailed the lovely idea and topped off a one-eyed description of Mr. Drummond's appearance and manners with a tender confidence:

I think he has a young heart attack coming on. When he holds up on his donkey's knees, I'll tell you about it.

The dearest friend, however, was going abroad for three months, and the lovely idea had to be laid away, safe from moth and rust, until she got back. The summer slipped into the fall. Mr. Drummond's donkey's knees—grown less and less like a donkey's as they muscled over—did not fold up. The young heart attack, alas, developed into a man's passion!

Drummond hid it proudly in his empty pockets. He had nothing to offer rich old Battle's daughter. Even his ancient name lacked a title to stamp it as standard exchange for American millions. For the first time in his life he thought disrespectfully of an ancestor, bloody and remote, who had haughtily refused a peerage, and slaughteringly of a kind, sound uncle and three innocent, healthy cousins between him and a marquise. Beastly luck!

He grew as brown as Bart. His father would have wept with pride on his chest. Sunshine, ozone, the smell of the redwoods, and love for Cynthia Battle made a fine man of him. He polished a quick native wit on Bart's keen blade. He learned to love and respect old Battle. He learned to talk less and think more in a new country.

The great West got a wedge into that six-hundred-year-old block in his brain. He was not so prime for the killing when the time came round for Cynthia's joke, sympathetically rehearsed in San Francisco, to be played in the Bald Hills.

But he was still good game. Cynthia fattened him, like a Strasbourg goose, with her pose of fair barbarian. That proud worm i' the bud fed on her irritated vanity, as well as on Drummond's sunburned cheek. It resisted all her poisoned sweets, stopped where it was, and declined to come out and be stamped on.

She hardened her heart, ordered her Yum-Yum costume, and named the evil day.

"I've asked a crowd up for to-morrow night, father. We'll have the piano in the gym, and dance—and some music. That means you, Carew!"

"All right—I'll sing your ears off, and I'll play for you to dance, Cynthia. I don't dance, you know."

"Oh, but I want you to dance with me, Carew! I'll teach you in five minutes. Come on and do a fox trot."

"No, thanks," said Drummond, fleeing from the pit. "What's wrong with you, old chap?" he asked Bart, clapping young Battle's shoulder as he passed. "You look as if you wanted to chew somebody!"

Bart waited for him to follow old Battle out of the room.

"I do," he said, glaring at his sister.

"Huh! I don't care."

"No—you don't care for anything or anybody but yourself!"

"How about you, trying to spoil everybody's fun?"

"Say, do you want to know why I *don't* spoil it by putting Carew on? Because I'm ashamed to let him know that I know my sister—"

"You'd better not! Ashamed? It's good missionary work. He'll be a lot happier, and so will other people, when he's had a little of the conceit taken out of him!"

"Oh, come off! You're mad because you can't get him to make a fool of himself. I've heard you trying."

"I don't have to try—he's got there. I hate people who *listen*!"

"Listen, nothing! You're always nagging the fellow to make love to you, and I don't believe it's ever entered his head. Pity you couldn't have some of the conceit taken out of *you*!"

"I'm *not*! I hate him! And I hate you, too, Bart Battle! You—"

"Coming for a ride, Cynthia?" called the other object of Miss Battle's hatred, from the veranda. "I've got the horses."

"In a minute!"

"Let us know how you get on this time," said Bart nastily, as she made a stately exit.

To ride with Carew Drummond and hate him every minute was so wearing that Miss Battle compromised by forgetting that she hated him when they rode together, and by vigorously reminding herself that she hated him worse than ever when they got back.

They rode together every day, in the early hours and in the late—when the redwoods stepped singly from the dawn, and the deer came down to drink at the spring; when the long afternoon burned in the hills and hummed and drowsed in the forest; when the purple-footed twilight climbed the mountains from the cañon, and muted calls came from the nests; when the moon rose over the forest, the redwoods lifted glittering spears, and the waters dashed bright crystal on the rocks.

To ride with Cynthia Battle and not love her every minute was so wearing that Mr. Drummond gave up trying to compromise. He loved her more and more when they rode together, and worse than ever when they got back.

"What are you thinking about, Carew?"

They were walking the horses home through the forest, and Drummond, silent and frowning, was brooding on his beastly luck.

"England."

"You don't look very happy when you think about England," said Cynthia, beginning to nag. "Won't you be glad to go back?"

"Glad to see my people, of course."

"Anybody else? Anybody in particular? Oh, you're blushing like anything! Tell me about her! We're just like brother and sister now, aren't we, Carew? You can tell me about your girl."

A terrific chattering broke out over their heads.

"I'd rather not—in a crowd," said Drummond coolly.

He broke off an acorn from a branch and shied it into the tree. A red brush went up to the top like a rocket.

Cynthia tilted her face up to watch it—and Drummond watched her, and went back to his beastly luck. Did it count much, one way or the other? Even if he were rolling in riches, like old Battle himself, was it likely that a lovely thing like Cynthia would ever care? The thought set him shivering hotly.

Cynthia suddenly turned her head and caught him with his guard down.

"Well? This girl you're so fond of—is she awfully pretty?"

"Awfully lovely," he said, trembling.

"Dark?"

"Yes—no, not exactly—"

"That's like me, isn't it? Is she anything like me, Carew?"

"Not a bit," said Drummond gamely, and got his eyes away. "I say, your mare's going lame, Cynthia!"

"Oh, bother!"

"Picked up a stone—I'll have a look."

"She'll kick your head off. I'll come."

Cynthia dropped beside him.

"Give me your hand, like a lady!" she ordered.

The mare jerked up her head, backed her bridle length, and went around, insanely, in circles.

"Isn't she a demon? There! I ought to have left it sticking into your foot! Oo-of—I'm warm! Let's tie them up, Carew, and have a rest in the woods."

Big trees had fallen in this part of the forest when old Battle built his shack. A single mammoth redwood withdrew, proudly aloof, from the giant rings of tall, young growth springing from the girth of decaying stumps. The ground was strewn with moss-grown logs and heaps of rotting chips and needles half buried in a riotous tangle of green.

They crossed the young redwood grove to the big tree, and Cynthia sank into a deep bowl-shaped hollow filled with loose dry needles, as yielding as feathers. She pulled off her hat and leaned her bright head against the trunk. The deep brownish red of the plushy bark claimed all her warm browns and reds and glints of gold in quick kinship with its own loveliness. It was a woodland idyl for a hopeless lover's eyes and heart to ache upon!

Drummond tried to take it lightly.

"You look like that redwoods dryad on the way home. I say, don't suddenly disappear!"

"Hold me back, then!" She stretched out her hand. "I'm going!"

"I might be turned into something. That's what happens, you know, to cheeky johnnies who get gay with nymphs."

He cleared the hollow with a jump and threw himself down on the other side.

"You wouldn't like that, would you—being turned into anything else? You like being Mr. Carew Drummond, don't you?" said Cynthia, sifting needles with the flouted hand.

"Oh, I say, Cynthia! You don't think I'm conceited?" He sat up to stare at her.

"What about?"

"Well—being English, for one thing."

"But that's not being conceited. I am English."



"Which means being *everything*, doesn't it? It means being everything that we're *not* over here. It means knowing about—oh, books, and pictures, and—and, of course, *music*, and—oh, being *superior* to Americans, doesn't it?"

"But that's not being conceited," said Drummond, naively accepting the English superiority. "We're an old country. We've been growing up in all that sort of thing since long before this country was born. We're bound to be ahead in some things, of course."

"Of course! That's just what I mean. Of course!"

"Well, but look here—it is *of course*, isn't it? That's not being conceited—it's taking things as they are. We don't put on side about it and say you won't catch up to us. You're doing it now. You're awfully quick and sharp over here. I've been surprised—" He stopped, nearly putting his foot in it. "In another hundred years—"

"Before then, maybe—we're such bright kids!"

She went off into fits of laughter. Drummond got up and crossed the hollow to her.

"Look here, Cynthia—if you mean that I've ever hurt your feelings, or Bart's, by talking about the things you're not up in over here—"

"Oh, you *haven't*! We—we've loved it—hearing about things we've never heard about—"

"Stop a minute! Listen! Cynthia, stop laughing! Listen!"

#### IV

A SOUND was growing in the forest. Distant, confused—coming rapidly nearer, rapidly becoming distinct—crashing—stamping—breaking brush—snoring—harsh, fierce grunts—thin, piercing squeals.

The woods all about them were suddenly alive with shy things darting from cover, with the desperate courage of need for safer shelter. Red squirrels scampered boldly across the hollow for the tall timber. Gray rabbits bounced for close burrows. A woodchuck swept the needles with her hearth-brush tail, bolting for a hollow log. Tree toads hopped on sprawling legs, with pulsing throats and grim mouths. The blinding blue of feeding jays flashed up to the sun. A deer passed like a near, swift shadow, and a young mountain cat like a streak of smoke.

Everywhere sounded the tapping and pattering of quick feet, the rustling and bumping of hurrying bodies. Everywhere were squeakings, chattering, small, sharp cries. Forest feuds were forgotten, the fear of man was laid aside. There was a general fraternity of terror in swift escape from the common enemy of all life aground in the mountain forests—the wild sow foraging with her litter.

Smashing, grunting, stamping, thrusting through the brush, she forged out among the young redwoods, with her young pigs pushing and squealing about her feet. Her unwieldy bulk heaving rage, her wicked little eyes burning red fury, her great snout filthy from her last kill, she charged straight down on the hollow.

The stamping of the horses and the mare's shrill squeal broke into the hideous din of grunts and ear-splitting squeals, and Cynthia's ringing scream:

"She'll kill us! She'll kill us! We can't get to the horses!"

"You can, if—"

Drummond dragged her to her feet, pushed her up the slope and around the redwood trunk, and turned to look, keeping her behind him.

"Wait till she gets up, and then run for it. Keep your head. Get up on the mare, and bring them up if you can. Now, *quick! Run!*"

The sow crashed into the hollow and sank in the loose needles to her monstrous belly. She brought down an avalanche from the sides, smothering her young, who tumbled after her, and cast up great red waves as she worked swiftly for the top.

A hapless young owl, thrust from a branch by some desperate fugitive, tumbled in a soft white ball from the tree and fell, feebly flapping, into the hollow. The sow stopped to root it savagely from the needles, gulped it into her maw, and slobbered bloodily as she climbed, with stained feathers and needles gummed to her reeking snout.

"Run! *Run!*" cried Drummond frantically, as Cynthia cowered against him in terror.

"I can't, alone! I'm afraid! She—I once saw an Indian—"

"Shut up!" He tore her clinging hands from his coat, and gave her a strong thrust toward the horses. "*Run! Quick!*"

She ran, stumbling, dragging her feet.

"*Run! Don't look back! Run!*"



She ran past the hollow, casting terrified glances over her shoulder.

The sow heaved herself over the top and saw Drummond step out from the shelter of the tree. He was showing himself to draw her attack.

The brute's bristles rose like iron spikes on her back, and her great neck swelled with fury as she saw him. She lowered her hideous snout and charged ferociously. As Drummond dodged around the redwood trunk, she whirled her huge bulk on her short iron legs with incredible swiftness, and galloped after him as if its weight were winged.

She knocked her young pigs back into the hollow with fierce sidelong blows of her snout, as they labored, shrilling, up her tracks, to reach her. Their scrambling and her stamping weight broke the earth away from the roots of the redwood, and left a sharp declivity.

As the chase went around the tree for the third time, Drummond's foot slipped on the mossy roots, and he dug his fingers into the soft bark to keep from sliding down into the hollow. It came away in patches in his hands. With this treacherous take-off, he must risk a jump and the open space beyond, or go to the bottom with the sow on top of him.

He could see that Cynthia was up on the mare, and had the chestnut in hand. With this to hearten him, he jumped—and scratched clear.

He heard the sow's fall among the shrieking young pigs in the hollow. Maddened by the check, she thrust savagely up the side, her breath roaring through her hoarse grunts.

The gaunt boles of the young trees gave no cover, on the rough ground, between Drummond and the horses. He dodged in and out, tripping and stumbling in the tangle, with death at his heels, sure-footed, swift, ferocious.

As the chase came nearer, the horses became almost unmanageable. Cynthia kept their heads away. The mare's head she jammed against a young redwood trunk, to blind her, and kept a grip like an iron clamp on her pulling mouth. She eased her hold on the chestnut's bridle rein with a turn around the pommel of her saddle.

Broken to hog running, the horse gave less trouble, until the mare put her madness into him. Cynthia felt the vicious kick under her that caught him on the flank, and

the strain on her saddle as he plunged. Then his bridle snapped, and he tore his head free.

"Get away! Cynthia, get away!" shouted Drummond, as the chestnut whirled about, and the sow swerved from pursuit of the man to charge the horse's legs.

In his fling, the chestnut brought his rump within bounds of a running leap. Drummond saw his desperate chance, and took it, fair across the sow's snout. He landed, sprawling, on his chest—and stuck, clawing for the saddle. He dragged and climbed over the terrified, kicking brute, and felt the fiery blow of the sow's teeth on his leg, as she ripped the leather from his boot.

The chestnut, looking to himself, let fly with murderous heels, and brought them smashing down on the evil snout. Then, trampling the shrieking young pigs, he ran, bridle loose, through the forest, beside the racing mare.

Drummond lay out across his neck, reached for the flapping leather, and got the horse in hand.

"Phew!"

"Oh!"

Cynthia pulled the mare in beside him, and pointed, dumbly, to the blood pouring from his boot. Drummond looked down at it, and laughed shakily.

"She's welcome to that much," he said. "I thought she was going to hand the lot around. Here, buck up!" he added, as he saw Cynthia's white face. "I say, you're not going to crumple up, after being so splendid?"

"Splendid? I? Oh, Carew! You—I didn't know anybody could be so brave!"

"Oh, rot! I was in a cold funk. You—I say, you're all right now—you'd better ride on by the road and keep 'em off. I can sneak this boot inside."

"Carew Drummond! Don't you suppose I'm going to tell father, and Bart, and everybody, how you—"

"Oh, I say, Cynthia, you won't? Promise, on your honor, you won't! I swear I won't show up on the ranch, if you won't promise—"

"I'll promise—for now, if you want me to; but—oh, Carew, you make me feel such a pig!"

"Don't say 'pig' to me, please, for the next hundred years. Look here—you're not going to do that!" Cynthia had burst into tears. "You've had a bad scare, you

know—that's all. You want to buck up and forget it."

"As if I ever could!" sobbed Cynthia. "I saw you come out from that tree. You never thought of yourself once—not even when you saw your horse getting away. Oh, Carew!" She leaned over to him and put her hand on his. "And I've been so horrid to you!"

"Look here!" said Drummond, paling, and clenching his hand tight under hers. "Look here—I can't stand for that. You've been—I've got no business to say it to you—you've been heaven to me—heaven. I know I've got no chance, but that's how it's been with me from the first. I've got to go away from you; but that's how I'll feel about you, always!" He covered her hand with his for a moment, and then laid it gently on the pommel of her saddle. "I'll—if you won't mind, I'll get on from here."

He was gone through the forest, leaving a trail of red-brown, spreading spots in the brown-red dust, and flecks of bright red on the green moss and the needles.

# V

CYNTHIA, crying bitterly, turned into the road and rode full speed for the ranch.

"Where's Pete?" she asked the Indian who ran to take the smoking mare.

"Quarters, guess maybe. Me call um?"

"I'll find him."

She found him at the Indians' quarters by the creek, where they had their tents or cabins as they liked. A statue of corrugated bronze, blanketed, he was squatting motionless by his tent—one of old Battle's full-blood brothers, a hundred years old.

"How!"

"How! You give me good medicine sow bite heap quick!"

He rose silently, stalked into his tent, and got the good medicine. As he handed it to her, he said unemotionally:

"Sow bite heap bad. Get up big—plenty. Maybe um die."

"You come see," said Cynthia, paling.

With the old Indian beside her, she knocked at Drummond's door.

"Carew!"

"Hullo!"

"I've got father's tame medicine man here to see your leg."

"Rot!"

"I want you to let him!"

"I tell you it's only a scratch."

"All right! I'll send father."

Drummond opened the door, laughing.

"I say, he won't try the tomahawk trick?"

"You let him, if he wants to. Heap big medicine man, aren't you, Pete? Hurry up, Carew. I have something I want to tell you."

"Here you are!" Drummond climbed—a little stiffly—up beside her on the flat rock by the spring that welled out close to the shack. "What have you got to tell me, Cynthia?"

"Oh, just—does it hurt?"

"My leg? Nothing much. Let's have the joke."

"I didn't say it was a joke," said Cynthia, coloring. "It wasn't anything. I'll tell you some other time. Do you get mad at jokes, Carew?"

"Not such a bally fool, I hope."

"It is silly, isn't it?"

"Of course—the beastly kind, you know—when people mean to hit you on the raw. You don't forgive that sort of—"

"I should if I liked the people," interrupted Miss Battle quickly. "If I liked them very much, I wouldn't be hurt."

"I fancy liking 'em would make it hurt a jolly sight more."

"Then if anybody you liked—if I—you know what you said in the woods—how you'd always feel about me—I suppose you wouldn't feel so any more, if I should hurt your feelings—just for a joke!"

"Cynthia!"

"I guess you don't think quite so much of me as you seem to imagine, if you're going to let a little thing like this—"

"Like what?"

"Not like anything! I said just *suppose*, didn't I? I don't want to talk about it! Here's Tony, anyway, with letters."

"Heap big one, Carry."

"From your English girl," remarked Cynthia spitefully, looking at the postmark.

Drummond slipped the letter into his pocket.

"Cynthia—" he began.

"I'm going in!"

Drummond followed her, mystified. He limped a little.

Miss Battle desperately approached her brother, who was not on speaking terms with her.

"I want to speak to you, Bart," she said, stalking him down the hall to his lair.

"What for?"

"About to-morrow night."

"Will you please get out of my room?"

"Wait a minute, Bart! You've got to help me!"

"I'll help you with pleasure," replied Bart.

He picked her up, set her down ungently in the hall, and banged his door.

"That's what you get trying not to hurt people's feelings!" thought Miss Battle indignantly, as she banged her own.

She sat up for an hour—the candlelight flickering over her bright hair and stringing little diamonds along the tips of her wet lashes—with conscience buzzing into one ear, and vanity buzzing into the other. She was engaged upon that world-old puzzle of how to satisfy both.

She got it at last, as smooth as silk. She would tell all the others that she had given up the joke. She would tell Carew that she had got them to learn the opera and give it up here, just as a surprise. Well, so she had!

She took this soothing idea to bed; and as soon as the light was out, it began to twist about and roll over on her.

What would they think? They might be angry; or they might think that she was soft, and laugh at her. Miss Battle wriggled under the bedclothes. They might think she was *soft on Carew Drummond*. Excruciating possibility! After all the fun she'd made of him in her letters—why, they would laugh fit to kill themselves. Fiery torture!

Suddenly she saw Carew's face, as he looked in the woods, coming out from behind that tree.

"I don't care—I'm *not* going to hurt his feelings! Laugh, if you want to! Laugh! Laugh!"

As nobody laughed, after this valiant dare, she went to sleep, feeling noble and brave.

## VI

In the morning Drummond could no longer hide the limp. In spite of plenty of good medicine, his leg was stiff and swollen.

"Got a bit of a kick messing about with the mare."

Old Battle immediately shot the animal—verbally.

"And don't you go riding her down the mountain to-night, to meet the folks, my

girl, and like as not have a funeral instead of a party."

"I'm going down on one of the wagons," replied Cynthia meekly.

Four wagons brought the conspirators up the mountain, amid screams and shouts of laughter. Cynthia did not tell them, *then*. She had not thought quite what to say. She would "bring it in," she decided.

Mr. Drummond was presented to a universal and expansive smile. He thought that Cynthia's friends had jolly manners, and their good English did not shock him out of his own good manners. He had discovered that the young West was catching up rapidly.

At Cynthia's command, he appeared—Bart likewise—in a dinner jacket and what old Battle called a "biled shirt." Cynthia was conscious of an inexplicable pride in him as her dearest friend ran him over with a critical eye.

"You said he was a silly-looking donkey," observed that enchantingly blond young person, prinking for dinner before Cynthia's glass. "I think he's simply stunning! If we make him cry to-night, I'm going to take him out alone on the veranda and dry his tears!"

"Are you?" Miss Battle inquired coldly.

"I perfectly love English manners! He's—"

"He's changed," interrupted Cynthia, breathlessly seizing her opportunity. "He's changed a lot—about everything. He isn't conceited any more—not a bit; and he knows nearly everything, now, about things out here. I don't think it would be a bit of fun trying to fool him to-night with 'The Mikado.' It would fall quite flat now. I think I'll just tell him we've got the music and costumes, and we'll let him play for—"

"Cynthia Battle! After getting us all to work like Chinamen at that old stuff! If anything could fall flatter than going through 'The Mikado' without getting some *fun* out of it—well, excuse me!" The golden curls that were the secret envy of Miss Battle's heart quivered with indignation. The sapphire blue eyes, for which she would have given her own trout pools and one ear thrown in, shot angry sparks. "I think you're too mean for anything if you tell him! What put that into your head?"

"Well," began Cynthia courageously, "I'm sort of ashamed to hurt his feelings."



I didn't think about it till you all got up here, and—"

She stopped, coloring hotly up to her eyes and down her neck. Miss Mab Maitland's wrath dissolved in dimples.

"M-m-m! I thought it was funny that you never said any more about that young heart attack! So *you* caught it! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"I *knew* you'd say that!" cried Cynthia, quivering under the lash.

"Ha, ha, ha! The s-s-silly d-d-donkey! Ha, ha, ha, ha! Won't they all just d-d-die?"

"If you don't stop, I'll never speak to you again!" blazed Cynthia. "I don't care a *thing* for him!"

"Well," Miss Maitland stopped long enough to ask, "then why do you want to spoil all our fun, just for *him*?"

"I don't! I'm going on with it, now, just to *show* you!"

"Good for you!" Miss Maitland returned to her prinking. "I don't believe he'll mind so awfully, if we're nice to him afterward."

She looked complacently at the desirable golden curls and sapphire blue eyes reflected in the glass.

"Ready?" inquired Miss Battle, meanly turning out the lights.

Bart put his hand affectionately on Drummond's arm, as they smoked together on the veranda.

"Let's cut that crowd and go for a ride, Carew. I can't stick my sister's friends!"

"Oh, I say, old chap! Cynthia would be hurt, you know; and I promised to sing. Where have they all got to, I wonder? By Jove!" The piano had started within. "Somebody's got hold of my 'Mikado' score—somebody who can *play*!"

Drummond jumped up excitedly, and got such a stab from his leg that he caught involuntarily at Bart's arm.

"Come on, old grouser," he said, turning it off. "Let's get inside."

The gym was a long room, opening from the living room, with sliding barn doors at one end. The furniture had been pushed back, and the piano placed near the doors. The girl playing the overture bent a convulsed face over the keys as Carew and Bart came in.

"This way to the boxes!" shouted old Battle, from a big settee across the other end of the room. "They're going to give

up a whole op'rar in Japanee, Caree! I caught 'em dressing up."

Drummond stood there, trying to understand, for all the world like a bull driven into the ring. Feeling Bart's tug on his arm, he went over obediently and sat down beside old Battle. Bart, with the vague idea of standing by that had got him into his dinner jacket, dropped dejectedly into the other corner of the settee. Then the barn doors were rolled back for the informal entrance of some extremely undignified gentlemen of Japan, and Cynthia's joke was sprung on that silly donkey, Mr. Carew Drummond.

It was all just a tremendous surprise at first. How had they managed to get it, he wondered? It was not until they were all on, and the thing got really going, that his musical sense told him this must be old, familiar music that these none too clever young amateurs were rattling off with such careless ease. By that time, their hysterical efforts to restrain wild mirth when he applauded, their hilarious voices and laughing eyes, curiously watching him, had begun to tell him that he was the bear in the pit.

He turned very white under his tan.

Evidently Cynthia had known all about Gilbert and Sullivan before he came to the Bald Hills. That is what she had been getting at in the woods. She had shared her laugh at his conceit with these amused young friends of hers, whom she had brought up from San Francisco to have their go at him. That is what she had been getting at by the spring—

She had been sorry, for a minute or two, just then—just after the near shave they'd had together in the woods. She had half decided to spare him. She didn't seem to be enjoying her fun.

Bart looked sick. Bart wasn't in this—nor was old Battle, who was laughing and shouting and stamping and thumping Drummond on his hurt leg. He sat very still between old Battle and Bart.

Cynthia!

## VII

THE whole performance was a scramble—the finish, pure farce. They were in a hurry for the fun. Everybody wanted to be first to see how he would look and hear what he would say.

He was standing up now, his leg hurting him awfully, getting ready for them, as



they came on. Gay, good-natured young butchers—not one of them would have hurt a fly—whispering, giggling, nudging, jostling one another, rolling up a bright wave of oriental color, crested with eager faces, sparkling with laughter. The wave surged across the room to Carew Drummond, impetuous, noisy, confident—and broke into harmless spray on the pride of six hundred years.

"I say, it was ripping! I've enjoyed it no end! My word, you can sing, all of you! I've got a grouch, though, you know—you might have let me have a look in. I know the jolly old 'Mikado' backwards. I bet I'd have put it all over your *Koko*, old chap! I'd have wrung tears out of old Allan, here, with my 'Tit Willow.' Clobber for me, Allan—thanks! I beg your pardon, Miss Maitland, will you have this? Lemonade? Here, Allan! Lemonade for Miss Maitland!"

"Carew!"

"Hullo, *Yum-Yum!* What a ripping costume! You're losing one of your almond eyebrows, though! Beg pardon, Miss Maitland?"

"Carew! I want to speak to you, right away!"

"Sorry, Cynthia—just a second. Miss Maitland was—beg your pardon, Miss Maitland?"

Miss Maitland was warm—"simply cooked," she said. She wanted Mr. Drummond to take her out on the veranda to drink her lemonade.

Mr. Drummond was awfully delighted to take her out on the veranda. He seemed to forget that Miss Battle wanted to speak to him right away. He took Miss Maitland out on the veranda and stopped there with her until Cynthia went out and called them in to supper.

She found them laughing fit to kill themselves. Mab Maitland's blond curls glittered in the moonlight like spun gold. The moon—and Mr. Drummond—were looking into her sapphire blue eyes.

"Do you care for any supper?" inquired Miss Battle.

Drummond held back as Miss Maitland passed inside.

"I say, Cynthia, will you arrange things so that I can dodge supper? The fact is—that letter Tony brought—I forgot it until to-night, just before the music. The fact is, I've got to get off in the morning."

"Carew!"

"I'd like to pack up now, if you don't mind, and come along later for a talk with you and your father and Bart."

"Carew!"

"Thanks, awfully."

The letter that Tony brought said nothing about Mr. Drummond's departure from the Bald Hills. Also, he had read it the night before. Also, he was in no hurry to pack. He lay, face down, on his bed, for a much longer time than it would have taken him to eat several suppers.

There was a pain in his heart and a fire in his head. He was also conscious of a different sort of fiery pain that darted up his leg and through his body, as the sow bite got up big—plenty.

It was when he lifted his head from the pillow, and put his legs to the floor, that this pain scorched and twisted up to his brain, and he had to sit down dizzily. He pulled up his trousers leg, pulled down his sock, and dabbed the good medicine freely on the bandage around his leg. Then he went along for his talk with the Battles; but he staggered, as well as limped, as he went, and felt a deadly nausea.

So it happened that when he opened the door and stepped into the room, he saw Bart waltzing toward him in crooked, lengthening loops, and old Battle bouncing up and down in his chair, and Cynthia breaking into bright orange flames before his eyes, until they closed on darkness and oblivion.

Then old Battle's money began to move in the mountains. It cleared tracks and oiled wheels and burned wires and devoured time and space. It brought up from San Francisco a bigger medicine man than old Pete. It brought up two Red Cross nurses—one for the day and one for the night—one just as quiet, cool, efficient, and impersonal as the other, and both of them determined to nurse Carew Drummond without any interference from Miss Cynthia Battle.

The redwood smell around the Battle shack was disheartened and driven away by the iodoform smell. All the light-hearted mountain life, within and without, was hushed and saddened. That bright flame of girlhood, Cynthia Battle, burned dim and low, and was nearly quenched by tears; for sow bite heap bad. Maybe um die!

Short winter days—long winter nights—snow on the mountains—wind in the forest—grief and fear in the Bald Hills.

Old Battle sat hunched in his chair, staring at nothing, his lips working.

"Oh, Almighty God!"

Bart strode about in a way to drive everybody mad. Nobody had the heart to stop him.

Cynthia lay crushed into the bearskin in front of the big fire. Little hammers knocked in her head:

"Carew! Carew! Carew!"

Carew, so young, strong, brown, and alive, who rode so well and loved the woods—his gay voice, his quick flush, his funny little English slang, his way of taking everything with—

"Oh, I say, Cynthia!"

The doctor came in. His face was enough. Old Battle found his girl in his arms.

"There, there! Father knows! Come, you got no call to cry *now*, my bird!"

Another two weeks of waiting before she could see him.

"Drink this," said the quiet voice of the Red Cross day nurse. "Then you must be shaved and made beautiful—you're going to have a visitor!"

Drummond smiled stiffly, and took the proffered draft.

Shaved and made beautiful, he sat up, under the big fur rug, when his visitor came in.

All through these weeks Cynthia had fretted to tell him what it was she wanted

to speak to him about *right away*. She came into the room with it on the tip of her tongue. When she saw him—the great, bony, weary length of him, with his hands like wax on the dark fur, strangely large eyed, and looking at her with a curious stiff smile—she said nothing. She ran to him, dropped on her knees, and put her warm young arms around him.

The nurse, who was not so impersonal as she pretended, slipped quietly out of the room.

"Cynthia!" he said, trembling very much.

"Carew, Carew, Carew! If you had died, I would have died, too!"

"You don't—you can't—"

"Oh, Carew, *yes!* Don't you *me*, any more?"

"Cynthia!"

"Then say it—what you said in the woods—about heaven. I've been miserable all this time to hear you say you didn't want to take it back. Say it, Carew!"

"Heaven—and earth—and everything—always and always and always!"

Miss Battle lifted her face—all sunglow—and let him look at it. As he looked, with wondering, almost fearful adoration, as if he expected it to suddenly disappear, she brought it a little nearer.

"I suppose you're afraid you might be turned into something, if—"

"Oh, I say, Cynthia!"

THE END

### THE ROAD TO MERRYALL

OH, I would go to Merryall upon a summer day!

The climbing road to Merryall, it takes a winding way,  
And golden winds about it blow, and hidden pipers play.

Upon the road to Merryall my love should fare with me;  
The ripening beauty of the year would gleam on mead and tree,  
But I within love's answering eyes would richer beauty see.

There's many a turn toward Merryall, there's many a dip and rise,  
But evermore the calling hills lift up against the skies,  
And rapture waits at every bend, and at the crest surprise—

The sweet, unsullied surge of earth horizons wonder wide;  
On every hand enchanted land, a vision glorified.

Oh, I would go to Merryall, my loved one at my side!

Clinton Scollard

# Wide Waters

A STORY OF SEA AND SHORE AND SHIPS AND SAILORMEN

By Captain Dingle

Author of "The Age-Old Kingdom," "Three Palms Cay," etc.

**A**LDEN TALBOT DRAKE often found himself wondering whether his sponsors had named him because of some incomprehensible expectations from distant family branches which had bequeathed to him the strange urge to vagrancy and the stubborn adherence to family duty which tormented him, or whether the urge, the adherence to duty, and, above all, the unconquerable yearning for the wide barrens of far oceans that was in him, were bred of the names themselves.

Alden Talbot Drake possessed characteristics which fitted all three of his names; but chiefly he was restless. The urge that had taken him to sea on leaving school had never left him. He had left the sea; and that, he now knew, had been a mistake.

The sea was in his blood. Even where his horizon was limited by terraces of brick and sooty trees, his nostrils would sniff quiveringly whenever the wind blew from the eastward. To the eastward lay the muddy river, and the docks, and the ships—ships, and the ports where romance beckoned still to bold youth.

He stood awhile at the gateway of his home, his nostrils tingling, his black eyes glittering, a discordant grin of discontent marring the good-humored lines of his strong mouth. He had come from golf, and there was a trace of contempt in the fashion of his unslinging and dropping the bag of clubs he carried.

The big house that he called home was one of those stately old places which always seem to have had owners provided for them as they were built, stone by stone, timber by timber—owners to fit their dignity, growing, maturing, as the years mellowed them. And Alden Drake had the looks and the dignity to fit smoothly into the groove

worn so unbrokenly by his immediate forbears. The trouble was that the groove did not fit him.

In externals he was part of the picture. His face was brown and clean-shaven, his hands were brown and well kept, his golf toggery was brown and of fine tailoring. All this appeared in complete harmony with the fine old house within the gate; but there was a glitter in his eyes, a vague something about his mouth, which jarred the harmony.

He turned in and flung the gate to with a harsh iron clang which startled a pair of fat horses just trotting past, dragging an old-fashioned low chaise. The discontent fled from his face, giving way to a genuine smile of amusement. Those horses looked as if nothing short of an earthquake could agitate them, so fat were they, and so staid. He realized how tremendously he must have slammed the gate to startle them, for they regained their steadiness in a moment, trotting placidly on.

The tranquillity of one of the two occupants of the chaise, however, was less easily restored. The innocent offender raised his eyebrows in surprise at the turbulent flood of deep water expletives that issued from somewhere in the thick, gray beard of a sturdy, copper-bronzed gentleman of nautical aspect.

Alden was about to raise his voice in apology. He raised his cap, instead, and stared with sharper interest at the other occupant of the vehicle—the driver, who, her horses again in hand, turned a fair face full of haughty reproof upon the cause of her brief discomfort. Then the equipage turned the corner of the road, and Alden went in.

As he bathed and lounged, smoking a rich old brier pipe, a relic of his prentice days

at sea, he scowled impatiently at the thought of the evening before him. His duty to society ordered that he should play host to a ponderous dinner party. He knew the party would be ponderous—he felt it in every bone; but, being a duty, he was bound to go through with it. The full-flavored tobacco in his rare old pipe soothed him somewhat; but even that precious combination was not enough to bring him complete resignation.

"There'll be Patty, all set to flirt," he growled. "Cæsar, how I hate that perfume she drenches herself with! Bilge! Pah! She'll call me 'Alden, dear.' Oh, Lord! And that cute little trick, Celeste—thirty-eight, if she's a day. Wonder she doesn't go up in smoke every time she lights a cigarette! Talk about putting a match near powder! Scissors! And the old hens, whose chicks are just getting old enough to be flown at my head! Suffering sailor, why should I put up with it? A lot of birds of prey! Damn women, anyhow!"

The youthful cynic knocked out his pipe, refilled it, and flung himself into a deep lounge chair, to smoke another round before his man came to fix him up for the evening. The second pipe always made him see a gleam of sunshine behind the stormiest of horizons.

His den was like no other part of the great house, which perhaps was the reason for his preference. Sporting pictures predominated on the walls—pictures of boxing bouts, of dogs, and of sailing races. Here and there a girl's face smiled out from a frame. All the faces were pretty, for Alden was a good judge of feminine prettiness. All the sailing yachts were swift, graceful, powerful, for he was a good judge of sailing craft, too; but the place of honor in the collection was occupied by a rough oak frame in which was a picture of a glorious full-rigged ship, clothed to the dogvanes with snowy canvas, foaming through leaping gray seas past the chalk cliffs of Dover.

Immediately beneath the roughened oak frame hung a silver oval, out of which a grand brigantine-rigged yacht seemed to be sailing in a smother of flashing bow wave, leaning to the breeze. There was a name under the great steel clipper—"Patriarch." The inscription beneath the smart brigantine yacht was "Patriarch," too.

Alden's eyes grew softly cloudy with reminiscence as they lingered on those two frames. On the floor beside the window

stood long sea boots. Beside the curtains hung yellow oilskins, a black rubber bridge coat, a sou'wester, and an arctic cap. Thumb mittens hung on a peg. A regular canvas sea bag stood taut and trim in a corner, with the lanyard drawn and knotted, as if all ready for sea.

In another corner a squat midshipman's sea chest stood. A real deep water donkey it was, heavily battened at the bottom, which was much larger than the heavily battened lid. It had rope grommets for handles, and a canvas cover was nailed over the lid, the edges cleverly fringed and tied into a shipshape pattern of diamonds and tassels.

Atop of the donkey lay a dusty half-pound cake of black tobacco and a sailor's sheath knife. These showed signs of being used but rarely. Only when the master felt very, very rebellious did he shred up a palmful of the plug and light it. His dear old aunt, keeping house for him, put her dear old foot down at having the place made to reek like a Noah's ark, as she termed it. He had told her that Noah didn't use that sort of tobacco, but it made no difference.

Thought of his aunt was engendered by sight of the tobacco, and he smiled. Thought of his aunt engendered, in turn, thought of another indignant feminine face—the prettily angry face of the girl who drove those two fat, lazy horses. He smiled more brightly. That face had only flashed across his vision for an instant, yet he retained a more vivid notion of its graces than close acquaintance with many another woman could leave.

"That brown hair might have golden glints in the sunlight," he mused.

He gripped one wrist with the other, full hand, sailor fashion, leaned his head back against the chair top, and blew smoke about his head until he saw nothing of the room at all. Then he could form pictures. It was an old trick of his. He saw, quite sharply clear, the picture of those fat old nags hauling that fat little low chariot. He saw the copper-bronze, leathery face of the old gentleman with the gray whiskers.

"A seaman, that," he decided.

The face of the girl was not quite so clear cut. Alden purposely permitted that vision to remain vague. He wanted to put in something of his own there; but he started with her brown hair, which might hold golden glints.



"What silly fashions girls wear!" he muttered. "Might as well put a pudding basin on her head as that fool hat. Hides most of her eyes and all of her ears."

His picture stopped short of the ears; but her eyes had been blue. He vividly recalled how frostily blue they had been, like the clear blue of an iceberg in shadow. They were shadowed with anger; but he knew they would be gloriously blue, with ocean's own blue, when fat old horses and human events went placidly. How well that deep blue would go with her color! Such a rich, health-given color it was—a bit heightened by anger, of course; but that, too, would pass into normal. There would be no chemical color about the normal, either.

Chemical color reminded him of Celeste.

"Oh, blast!" he growled.

He shot from his chair, and the dream face vanished.

At seven o'clock he was dressed and ready to go down. He knew his guests were arriving, for he could hear their cars from his dressing room; but on his way down he entered his den again. He felt uncomfortable. He never liked entertaining, but never before had his dislike taken the bitter turn it seemed to have taken to-night. He felt as if he simply could not play host, even to save his reputation for courtesy.

He loaded up his pipe again, flung wide the eastern window, and stood puffing quick little smoke balls out into the night. There was a suggestion of fog creeping up from the river. The street lights and the lamps of moving vehicles were blurred and yellow. There was a tang in the air, too—a vague salty tang, a tang of tar and wet jute, of paint and heavy black sugar, of docks, and dunnage, and deep water ships.

He stood there, never hearing the dinner gong. The den was filling up with smoke and fog. The mist outside grew denser. He was lost in himself until the door opened, and his aunt burst in protesting:

"Alden, dear, are you ill? Your guests! Oh, dear, that horrid tobacco again! Why, Alden, this is a shame, upon my word it is! You positively reek, *reek*, of that beastly old pipe! Come down, do! But you really must use some perfume to-night. Here!"

So Alden Talbot Drake permitted himself to be sprinkled copiously with Jockey Club, so that he might not smell like unto Noah's ark; and he went to table, and smiled, and talked, and played the host to

his guests, without in the least knowing what he ate, what he said, or what was said to him.

Near the end of dinner he became conscious of one good lady's reproving stare. Then he noticed that his dinner partner had been the good lady's latest eligible daughter. The girl herself was too recently from school to dare tell him what she thought of his neglect.

He tried to make up for it thereafter; but mamma's evening had been spoiled. He was rather glad of that. Mamma was a notorious hunter. He squared himself fairly easily with the girl. He took her out to the conservatory after dinner, got her an ice, pointed out a big yellow street light through the fog, and likened it to the moon. The silly child wove around it a romance which satisfied her for many days—until, in fact, mamma flung her at somebody else's head.

Alden stole away at the first opportunity and reveled in the dank fog, along with his pipe, defying aunty and all her kind. He went right down into the garden, beyond the lawns, where the fence was low and the house was hidden. Here he paced the short gravel walk, unconsciously assuming a measured quarter-deck stride, puffing goutts of smoke against the fog.

Every now and then he raised his head to sniff the air. The tang of the river was sharp. He threw out his chest and inhaled deeply. The Drake in him had never been so insistent before. He wanted to hurl down fences—literal fences as well as those of custom—and tread the world underfoot until he was sure that no barriers would ever be raised again.

Like many another scion of a good family, Alden had gone to sea upon leaving school. When the lordly clipper ship reigned on the sea, sons of rich fathers, as well as sons of tradesmen, served an apprenticeship in sail simply for the experience. Few remained in the profession. Many never made more than the first voyage. Alden had completed his four years, because he loved the life.

He had been a good sailor, too. He had secured his second mate's ticket at the first attempt. Since there was no hurry for him to settle down at home, and since he would not have to worry about earning a living, he stayed on in the grand old Patriarch until he passed for first mate and then master in turn.

Then, inheriting his fortune, he had quit the sea—quit it professionally, that is. He had built another Patriarch for his pleasuring—a smart brigantine yacht capable of cruising the world around; and he chose to command her himself. So that he might always do this, he had never neglected to keep his master's certificate renewed and up to date.

That was one of the sharp thorns always in his side. He had taken down the certificate from beside his pictured ships, because it always stung him to violent rebellion. At such moments he was ready to hurl every consideration to the four winds and ship to anywhere on the Seven Seas. Of course he knew how absurd the impulse was. That was why he had fought it.

He had made two long cruises in the yacht; but that was a futile sort of seafaring, he thought. Auntie was there, and auntie's party. It was much like being at home, except that she could not accuse him of making the wide, free spaces reek like Noah's ark with his cherished old pipe. No—what he wanted, savagely desired, was to sail down the forties in a storming clipper again; to hurl the challenge of her glorious strength and his hardihood into the teeth of old Cape Stiff; to coax her, gentle her, through doldrum zephyrs between the trades; to sail her grandly up channel, flaunting her speed in the tugboat's face, and bring her, deep with precious cargoes, into her port again.

He had fought against that urge until he was sore with the conflict. He had never even surrendered to the longing to spend just one day in Sailortown, among the docks, among the men who sailed the ships. That longing was easier to combat. He could hop into his car, get somewhere outside city limits, and burn up the roads in a mad whirl of speed; but while he was breathing dust and gasoline fumes, his mind would roam seaward to the tall clippers and the blue of the Indian Ocean.

His pipe went out. He raised his head and sniffed at the thick fog now blotting out everything. He could not see the nearest light, but he could still smell that river tang, the weedy reek of the seaward rolling waters.

Above the dull, tremendous roar of the vast city there was a faint, remote, scarcely recognizable note that sounded for just a moment, and then was lost; but he caught it. It was the throaty blare of a river tug,

preparing, perhaps, to drag a tall ship from the dock into the hurrying tide.

Muttering while he knocked out the cold dottle of his pipe, Alden raced back to the house, sneaking in by a servants' entrance. The lower part of the building was bright with lights, alive with people. He ran up to his rooms, snatched up more tobacco and a light overcoat, and, with a cap tucked in the pocket, crept down to the entrance again. In the garden he had to wait, for laughing voices were at the door. Some of his guests seemed as defiant of the fog as he was.

Something white rushed out of the fog screen and cuddled beside him with a little scream of gratification.

"Oh, Alden, dear, I knew it was you!" prattled the fair Patty. "I adore fogs! Are you going to prow! in it? Do let me come with you! It's simply thrilling! Will you? I'll fetch a wrap."

"Listen, Patty," he whispered, inspiration surging over him like a beatific sea. "I'm searching for something. It's not for everybody to know, yet. Can you keep a secret?"

"O-oh! Yes, yes! Do tell me! I'm positively thrilled!"

Patty snuggled closer, her hair tickling his chin, her bold eyes flashing squarely into his, until she lowered her lashes in clever embarrassment.

"I think you will be thrilled," he told her. "Stay here until I come back. Then I'll tell you the secret. Perhaps I'll let you prow! with me afterward. Hush! Don't say a word!"

He plunged into the fog and lost himself in the by streets until well away from the house. Then he lit his pipe afresh, buttoned his coat, and set out at a swinging pace, regardless of fog or more cautious pedestrians, following his nose toward the riverside.

## II

HALTED suddenly by a congestion of fog-bound busses, Alden Drake leaned against a lamp-post and for the first time realized how soft he had become. His chest heaved to the protest of fatty lungs, and his legs, once they came to rest, seemed to tighten all down the back.

He saw the name on a bus which stopped so close to the electric light upon his lamp-post that the shade still shook from a light touch.

"Burdett Road! I haven't walked two miles, and I'm laboring like a foundered cow!" He laughed. "Golf! Eighteen holes at a snail's gait, socking a little ball with a big stick, and doddling along until you find it; then home in the car. Car here, car there, even an elevator car to take you from one floor to another in the house. And this is the regular thing I've done for years! Drake, you chump, you—"

A hoarse voice barked at him out of a brown patch on the fog.

"Taxi, sir?"

"Yes—West India Docks," he said, and laid hand on the cab door. Then he laughed again, in fine contempt of himself. "No thanks, old chap—I'll walk," he said. "Here, though—buy yourself a pint of rum and wait till the fog rolls by."

He crossed the road and whistled his way onward, still following his nose toward aromas which were tenfold intensified. He recognized the smell of ship chandlery. There was the richness of oakum, of pitch, of tarpaulins. There was the sizzling greasy reek of fried fish and potatoes. Nearer than before, tugboats blared.

A red light gleamed through a curtained window beside him. A door was flung wide at one side of the window, and a mellow sailorman emerged, going large, towed to a short hawser by a saucy little Sailortown hussy, who looked capable of bringing him to port.

"She give me 'er towrope an' took me in tow, An' yardarm to yardarm away we did go, Singin' folderol laddidy, folderol lay!"

So he sang, that sailorman, and the little hussy laughed right merrily as they navigated a wide traverse across the blind road.

"West India Dock Road!" chuckled Drake.

He drifted on, coming down to a leisurely saunter. He knew that a little way farther along the dock gates ended the road. Between the red-curtained pub and the gates were many similar places where sailors spent their time and money. Some were a bit quieter outwardly. Boatwains, carpenters, and cooks used those places, for a round or two; then, as a rule, they went to the less quiet places, unless they were really married and had to go home. There were quite refined places, too—places where the barmaids were younger and less dependent on paint to enhance their lines. Senior apprentices went there, and third mates,

young seconds, and stewards. Dignified first mates and captains might bend to have one drink with their juniors there, before taking train to load full cargoes in the city.

A girl jostled against Alden as he hesitated outside a pretentious pub that he had known years ago. He did not notice her laughing face, small, red-lipped, bold-eyed. He scarcely noticed that she had a female companion until he heard some one say in a tone of disgust:

"Come on, Liz! Don't wyste yer time. Blimy, he's a bleedin' toff! Pipe 'is bloomin' trousers! Silk ribbon down 'em!"

He hurriedly brought together his overcoat front. He had unbuttoned in order to search his pockets for possible cash. When he started out, he had forgotten that essential. Now he found himself in the heart of Sailortown with a pitiful few gold coins to jingle. At least, they seemed pitifully few. He had always had all the money he wanted, since coming into his inheritance. Now the thought occurred to him that he had never valued his good fortune.

"Damn it! Few as they are, they're more than many a good sailorman gets for a twelve-month pay-off!" he muttered, and pushed in through the glass doors of the saloon bar.

As soon as he entered, he knew that the old time atmosphere was gone. True, the few men standing at the bar, or sitting down in the private cubbyholes, had the mark of the sea upon them; but they were steamer men. Their hands were white, and their clothes cut with scrupulous avoidance of nautical pattern.

As Alden stepped to the bar and called for a drink, he heard no subdued rumble of men discussing his strange attire. In any real Sailortown bar, somebody would have howled at his dinner clothes. He would have taken it good-humoredly, bought a round for all hands, and been let in to the circle; but here was genteel decorum.

He sipped his whisky, glancing all about him. Over on the other side of the house, in the public bar, a man with a mahogany-colored face looked promising. Their eyes met.

"Ahoy! Ahoy, you with the gafftawps! collar an' paper shirt, heave yerself over to windward here an' have a drink 'long o' a sailorman!"

The invitation was bellowed forth in true hurricane tones. A sharp female voice cut



in, a female hand like a claw took hold of the salty one's collar, and dragged him outside without ceremony.

One of the polite steamship officers appeared to feel that somebody ought to apologize to the stranger for the affront.

"That's Blimy Bill, sir. He's a rummy card. Doesn't mean any harm, though."

"Sailorman?" queried Drake.

"Bill? I believe he made one voyage in a drifting barge. It went adrift while he was sneaking a snooze in the hold, and carried him as far as Isle o' Dogs. He sponges for his beer on paid off crews, and his wife comes and hauls him out before he gets into trouble."

"Where are all the deep water sailors, anyhow? I remember when this place was full of square-rigger men."

"Few out of this dock now, sir. What there are go farther up the road. There are only two deep water vessels in dock now, and one of them hasn't had anybody but a watchman aboard for a month or more."

Drake stayed half an hour, and left full of amazement at the change that had come over Sailortown in a few short years. He felt that it would be useless to proceed by gradations. He hurriedly raked over his memory for directions, unwilling to ask, and plunged off through the dripping fog again.

The street he now traversed was blatant with sound, garish with flaming kerosene torches. Here an oyster and whelk stand at the curb was crowded around with hungry roisterers, who brought their own beer and stout in tin cans. Over them roared and dripped a naked coal oil flare. There a well fed, keen-eyed blind beggar played most dolefully on a tin whistle, while his battered tin cup rang full of the pennies of sailormen, who knew that he was a fraud, but still felt pity.

Pub doors swung with a regularity that kept a shaft of yellow light stabbing across the fog-blinded pavement. A happy sailor cruised by, a large-batted lady lovingly draped on each arm. They bore down upon a fried fish barrow, where Jack gathered up huge newspaperfuls of steaming fish and chips, bestowed them upon his fair ones, and paid the apprehensive vendor double fee with a lordly air.

Two sailormen cruised together, scorning women, their arms wrapped about each other's necks, singing, "No more I'll go a rovin'." They stumbled upon a baked po-

tato engineer and overturned his stock in mock anger. He went and cursed them as he chased the rolling potatoes in the grime of the gutter.

"'Ere, go an' buy yerself a barftub to cry in, father!" they roared, and paid him the price of two stocks.

Drake laughed contentedly. This was Sailortown, as of old.

By a winding traverse that had taken him into half a dozen colorful resorts, Drake arrived, just before midnight, right in the thick of the life his heart craved for. By that time his silk-braided dress trousers were well spattered with mud and beer droppings. His light coat, which he had contrived to keep buttoned, was spotted with fried fish grease and the sooty moisture of the fog. A bit of fried fish hung by a sharp bone to his cap.

In one place, where the scale of life had reached a sportive plane, some sportsman had chucked a paperful of fried fish across the bar at another sportsman, who promptly returned as much of the flying edible as he could get his grip upon. Drake wasn't aware that he carried any memento of the incident out with him. He laughed until his ribs ached as he pushed through the crowd to the door, and made for another place.

He was enjoying himself shamefully. He conjured up a picture of dear Aunt Angelina. It made him rock with excruciating mirth. More than a few stout half quarterns of smoky Scotch whisky had helped him arrive at his present happy mood; but he had not taken enough to more than mellow him.

Where the fish was flying he had made up his mind to round up and finish out the evening; but he soon saw that there were as many outsiders there as real sailormen. As much talk centered on horses as on ships. He knew there was a notorious house right opposite the dock wall—which wall he was not sure. A fat man wheezed after him as he left the fish fight.

"Me, too, matey! That ain't no place for a sailor no more. Hoss racin' an' chuck-in' fish about! What the world's comin' to I dunno," puffed the friendly stranger, heaving alongside and keeping step.

Drake glanced at him as they passed a lighted window. He was a fat little man—a roly-poly little red man. A battered cheese-cutter cap squatted down solidly upon gray-shot red curls above a rubicund,

gray-eyed face. The battered cap looked as if it were new, and battered by design for better comfort—which it was. The rubicund face looked as if it would be rubicund even if its wearer had not looked upon the rum when it was ruby.

"I was looking for the Chain Locker," said Drake, glad of the company proffered.

The man looked all a sailor, anyhow. He did seem fat and overfed, for a deep water man. No doubt he had been getting rid of a thumping pay day; or perhaps had got a bit soft, like Drake.

"Me too, matey," the fat sailor wheezed. "Come along o' me. I'll show yer."

He gripped Drake's elbow with his fat, short fingers; and Drake felt as if his arm had been seized in a rat trap. That grip, sureiy, had been developed on many a wet halyard and frozen brace!

As if he had noticed Drake's appraisal of himself, and meant to return the compliment, the sailor looked over the light overcoat, the spattered dress trousers, and the fine shoes in one swift glance.

"Got yer ticket, ain't yer?" he wheezed.

As they passed under a lamp, he took another rapid glance.

"Secon' mate?" he suggested.

Nobody belonging in Sailortown, except a new second mate, would wear clothes like that.

"Not quite," Drake laughed. "Just visiting."

"Ho! Mission bloke!" grunted the fat man, and puffed along in silence for a while, until he looked up just long enough to wheeze: "Thought you might be a noo secon' mate. Look some'at like a sailor-man, too."

Alden Drake warmed to the little man. Here was a sailorman of discernment! The night promised well.

Almost over his head, as they crossed a corner under an arc light, a long jib boom stabbed the night from beyond the wall. Full of snowy, furled jibs it was, glistening with moisture in the fog. Alden laughed, following the fat little man; and in a minute more they thrust through smudged glass doors, beyond which was music, and stood together at a crowded bar in a blue-hazy room that shook to the tramping of many capering feet.

While his companion seemed to be deciding what was proper to order for a mission bloke, Drake slapped down two or three gold pieces and gave the barman a

finger waggle. He felt as a green apprentice feels when a loafer calls him "captain." All the soft, lazy years dropped from him. This was life! The music was lilting, blood tingling, even though it came from nothing better than a German accordion and a fiddle of no ancestry. Sailors danced. Sailors sang "Abel Brown," "The Farmer's Daughter of Pennsylvanee," and "Good Morning, Mr. Fisherman." Men shouted to men of skysail-yarders, of running down the easting, of Cape Stiff.

The tobacco smoke stung Alden's eyes, made him want to cough. There was sting enough in the very fumes of the liquor to make a towny stagger. Behind the bar stood a ship in a bottle, made by a ship's cook. A sailor wearing earrings danced decorously with a woman who smoked a cigar and capered with utter abandon.

Alden Talbot Drake was a long, long way from home. He began to forget that he had ever lived in a world of Aunt Angelinas, of perfumed Pattys, of chemical Celestes, of formal dinner parties and deadly decency.

"Call all hands up and give 'em a double tot on me!" he ordered, shoving over the cash, and thereby earning the privilege of having a smelly swab wiped casually over a small circle of bar top immediately in front of him.

The fat little sailorman eased in beside him, wheezing heavily.

"I knowed you wasn't no mission bloke," he chuckled. "Young orf'cer come inter some money, ain't yer?"

"Shouldn't wonder," laughed Drake. "Fill 'em up here! All together, now! Down the hatch!"

### III

"My name's Buntin'—Joe Buntin'," wheezed the fat little sailorman at Drake's side.

Already the crowd had swallowed their drinks and gone back to their fun. It was nothing new for a man to treat the crowd in Sailortown.

"Thanks, Buntin! My name's Drake," grinned Alden, taking a fat, short-fingered fist and wincing at the grip it gave him.

"Not Buntin, matey—Buntin'," corrected the little man. "I ain't strong enough to shout for all hands. Let's you an' me lower one, just for luck. Then I'll interduce you to Mag Parrot. A hot un, she is!"

It was hard navigating to reach the end of the room. The earringed sailor had grown sentimental. He and his lady revolved slowly in the center of the dance. She wanted to caper. He wanted to make love. It was a deadlock, around which vociferous couples whirled to mad music.

Drake was intoxicated—not with liquor, as yet; but the tang of the waterside was in his brain. The hoarse voices of sailormen working hard at their pleasure, the shrill cries and laughter of flushed and bright-eyed women gathering harvest while they might, the smoke, the sawdust, the tramp of booted feet—all these intoxicated him.

Every now and then the door opened and let in some fog. Drake had glanced at his watch once; he didn't look again. For the first time in years he was going to let himself go the limit.

"Here, Mag! Meet my friend Mr. Drake," Joe Bunting was wheezing.

Alden was shaking the cool, hard hand of Miss Parrot. He laughed happily, dragged her without great effort into the dance, and in a moment was whirling as madly as the rest.

He met the girl's hard eyes. They were glassy bright, black as shoe buttons. Her lips were the reddest he had ever seen. He wished that somebody had given her lessons in reddening lips without letting the stick wander. She laughed up into his face, and he felt the warm, lithe body of her press boldly against his. There was no shyness about Mag.

"Shake a leg, deary!" she cried. "Blimy, you ain't shy, are you? 'Ere!"

In a flash she had exchanged her gaudy hat for Alden's sober cloth cap, and forced him to faster whirling, laughing her challenge. The mad spirit of the mad hour possessed him. He carried her in one headlong rush into a corner, sat her down, and bent over her, opening his coat and jingling his cash.

"What 'll you have, Miss Parrot?" he asked.

Her bright eyes widened for an instant at sight of his broad white shirt bosom.

"Blimy, you're a toff, ain't you?" she said. "I'll 'ave a glass o' sherry wine with you."

Toff! It was the second time Alden had heard the word applied to himself that night—in a tone, too, which implied that he was not of the class he was playing with.

"Don't call me that, please," he protested. "I'm a sailor."

She winked at him impudently. He brought her some sherry, and she drank it sitting upon his knee. She grew affectionate. He awkwardly excused himself, and went off to find his pal Joe. He knew he was being pointed out to the other girls as an exhibit, perhaps to be exploited.

A big blond man in a pilot jacket looked in, exchanged a word with the proprietor, and lingered for a moment in the door before going out.

"Hey! Ain't there no doors where you wuz dragged up?" roared a broken-nosed dwarf with the shoulders of a gorilla.

The man in the doorway laughed shortly as he closed the door behind him. The crowd mocked and hooted.

"That's the myte o' the bloomin' Orontes," wheezed Joe Bunting.

"Then this can't be his crew," Drake rejoined.

"Never can tell, matey," Joe retorted. "How's Mag? Hot stuff, ain't she?"

"Nice little lady," grinned Drake. "Let's have a drink."

Joe glanced queerly at his companion. His own experience of Mag and her kind was wide and varied, but never had he heard one of the sisterhood dubbed "little lady" before. Somehow Drake puzzled him—there was so much of the sailor about the man, yet so much not of sailors.

"Let's forget the ladies for a bit, and talk ships," said Drake. "Where are all the sailing ships disappearing to these days? You mentioned the Orontes. Is she the crack jute clipper?"

"That's her—Java sugar trade, now. Six t'gallant yards, an' main skys'l."

"I know her! Lord, what a beauty she was!"

"Bloomin' man killer!" grunted Joe.

"Fast as they make 'em!"

"Wet as a half-tide rock!"

"She had the record to Calcutta, didn't she?"

"Aye—lost a hull watch from the fore braces one v'yage, an' killed a man by heavin' him over the wheel an' bustin' his back on the rail!"

"I'm afraid you're a grouser, Joe," laughed Drake, good-humoredly. "Have another shot o' rum."

"Some men cracks a ship up ashore, an' grouses all the v'yage," Joe retorted, swallowing a sip of rum that had been thor-



oughly mumbled. "Others grouses ashore, but if so be they has to ship deep water again, they does their work like sailormen."

"That's the boy! I'll bet you're that sort, Joe! I'd like to make a voyage with you."

"I ain't goin' to sea no more, matey. I've had mine. I'm goin' to get a soft job lumpin' cargo in the docks," said Joe.

Drake rambled through the smoky room again. A little knot of dance-drunk men argued fiercely on some vague point of seamanship. The girls swept in among them, and stopped the wordy battle. There was no profit in argument. As long as a man kept on dancing, or drinking, he would want a girl, and would treat her.

Two hot and lusty young sailors quarreled over a girl. They fought—a short, hard-hitting, foul-mouthed fight that produced swift crimson and ended in a drink. The girl had found a new bully before the drink was down.

Drake felt utterly at ease. He had paid his footing. Men took no notice of his attire. Girls did, but only appraisingly.

"Blimy, ain't you got no manners, cocky?" shrilled Mag at his side. She hooked on to his arm and dragged him over to a corner, to present him to her pals with proprietary pride. "You're a nice sort o' bloke, leavin' a lydy! Ain't you goin' to stand treat?"

Mag winked at her cronies as Drake weaved through to the bar and brought drinks; but, the treat finished, she towed him away from temptation, wanting him herself.

The door opened again. The same big blond man looked in, and went out. The barman shouted to the crowd to line up for drinks on the house.

Mag dragged Drake down beside her.

"Don't you go!" she whispered. "Stop along o' me!"

She glanced at the milling crowd at the bar. None of the women had gone. She began to whisper things to Drake which made his ears tingle. Her ways were direct ways. She lost no time.

"Let's you an' me slope out o' here. I got a nice little place, deary," she coaxed.

"Hey, matey! Come on an' get yer drink," bellowed Joe Bunting.

"Don't you go!" said Mag, pulling at Drake's coat.

He laughed down at her, gently releasing

her hands. Taking one of his few remaining gold pieces, he pressed it into her hand.

"I'm sorry, Mag. Buy yourself a new hat with this; and thanks for a very pleasant evening!"

He turned to leave, for Mag had brought the issue down to a point he had no expectation of reaching when he started on his wild expedition. He would bid Joe good night, and take home a memory that would last him a long time.

"I 'ope you get run over, you bloomin' welsher!" screamed Mag.

Men swung around at her cry. Only the ready wit of Joe brought Drake into the circle before some hothead took up Mag's championship.

"Stand treat!" wheezed Joe. "Go on! Buy drinks, afore some boozy whelp starts pickin' a fight! That's Mag's old trick. I knows the hussy!"

Drake stood at the bar, and after two treats they accepted him again. Mag had found another and a less finicky flame.

He felt some queer influence at work within him. The smoky room was hazier, the clatter of tongues harsher. One by one the crowd dropped out, but they started no more dancing. Other men appeared behind the bar. Again the big blond man looked in, nodded, and went out.

Joe Bunting stood stoutly by his pal. It seemed to Drake as if he had embarked upon a mad bout of drinking. Soon Joe waddled away to a bench and slumped into sleep. Drake uttered a whoop of victory. Hazy and vague though everything seemed, he felt ridiculously elated at standing there at the reeking bar, swilling down an utterly unwanted glass of greasy rum, when no other man remained on his feet.

"I'll sing y' a s-song," he offered. "S-sing y' a s-song o' the s-s-sea! Strike up a t-tune, m' lads! S-sing y' s-song—"

All the musical instruments he had ever heard started to play every song he had ever heard at once. Alden Talbot Drake smiled a foolish smile, wagged a silly head, and two barmen dumped him on the bench beside Joe Bunting.

The girls began to drift out. Their evening was done. Mag passed, with her nose in the air; but she came back to look at her toff. She looked at him quite earnestly, for Mag.

"I'm goin' to get a cab for 'im," she stated. "'E ain't our sort. 'E's a gent. 'e is. I'm goin' to send 'im 'ome."

She flounced out into the thick night. The barmen looked at the landlord. He swept his eye swiftly around the somnolent crowd, counting them.

"Take 'im upstairs," he ordered. "If that 'ussy brings a keb 'ere, 'e's gone 'ome, see?"

#### IV

OF one thing Drake was sure, when a beam of hot morning sunlight stabbed him into wakefulness. He was alive—of that he was certain. Afterward, he recalled wishing that he were dead.

The sun came through a dirty window. It burned his eyes. It made his head throb. It reminded him that he had played the giddy goat in Sailortown. He wondered if, after all, the colorful canvas of Sailortown got its pigments from romance—whether rum were not the painter.

"Great Cæsar's ghost, what a head!" he groaned.

He tried to sit up. He could not. He knew that he lay on some sort of couch, because his hand, groping beside him, felt no floor. He lifted the hand; it weighed fifty tons. His wrist watch was gone. He shook his head. He knew he had a fob watch, as well as the wrist watch. He felt for it, but his hand fell listlessly toward the floor again.

"I must have drunk cyanide. This must be hell," he chuckled.

Somehow he felt amused at his plight. If only he knew what time it was! If only he had a drink!

He stared through a yellow shawl of dust-patterned sunbeams, out of the dirty window. There was a long jib boom, with jibs furled upon it, spiking out over the street from the dock beyond the high brick wall. A distortion in the window glass focused the light in a squat red circle. He laughed foolishly. It was the fat red face of Joe Bunting smirking at him. Again he tried to rise, and fell back with his head ringing horribly.

"Thank my lucky stars I wasn't shanghaied, anyhow!" was his painful but thankful prayer. "If I only had a big jug of water! Oh, Lord!"

Voices sounded outside the room. They were at the door. One was a roaring, storm-bred voice. It was spouting bitter, briny profanity.

The door opened. Drake turned leadenly to look. There was a big blond man,

wearing a pilot jacket, and the landlord. They were angry.

He felt only mildly interested. He tried to ask for water, but was not sure that they heard him. He was shocked at their impoliteness toward each other.

"I paid you to get me twelve men!" roared the big blond man. "You welshed me, you crimpin' crook!"

"You're lyin', Mr. Stevens!" shouted the landlord, unafraid. "I got 'leven. This bloke looked as if he might pass out—that's why I didn't send 'im with the rest. 'E's all right now. I'll send 'im down."

"Send him to hell!" bawled Stevens furiously.

He leaned over Drake, glared into his face, and thumped him heavily in the ribs. Drake only grunted and tried to shake his heavy head reproachfully.

"See here—this ain't the first time you've dutched me over men! You'd send me this junk-laid hunk o'—"

He stepped crouchingly toward the crimp, his blond face turning purple with rage, his blue eyes snapping. The crimp put up his hands and spat fearsomely on the floor.

"Don't you lay 'ands on me, mister!" he warned. "I give you my word, I'll 'it back 'ard! Stop it! Stop it!"

Drake only hazily knew the moment when the fight began, but he was sitting up before it was finished. The crimp hit, and hit hard, but he was putty in the hands of the big blond man. Stevens hit him once, with a blow that would have floored him but for the wall, which creaked under the impact of his body.

Crafty in free-for-all fighting, the crimp rebounded from the wooden wall, launched himself forward in a crouch and gouged upward with his extended thumbs for his foe's eyes. Stevens was crafty, too. He jerked his head upward, and snapped at the thumbs with his teeth. He caught one, and bit hard on it, while the crimp bellowed with pain.

Then Stevens let him go; and, while the man stood on one leg, twisting around and around, wringing his half severed thumb, the blond man stepped in coldly, methodically, like a cooper walking around a cask, and punched with all his muscle and weight at the other's face and jaw.

Six sickening punches landed before the crimp fell—six cutting punches that sent the blood spattering over walls and floor.

The last two landed upon an unconscious man; and when he pitched headlong across the couch where Drake lay, his head struck the iron with a crack.

The fall knocked the wind out of Drake, but it also dissipated some of the mists that fogged his brain. He dragged a leg and an arm free, and began to struggle up.

The big blond man glanced contemptuously backward as he quitted the room.

"Send me a bloomin' dude for a sailor, will you? A dude like *that*! If it was only a man—"

Stevens passed from view, and Drake fought himself to a sitting posture, his sluggish blood beginning to leap with shame. The epitome of everything contemptible, mean, useless, and utterly undesirable was expressed in the big blond man's phrase:

"A dude like *that*!"

"I'll show him!" he gritted, and made a bold stagger across the room.

He was back in his shipboard youth again. A fight was the natural sequel to such an insult as that. Queerly, though, his legs felt unwilling to keep pace with his weakly clenched hands. He spun around on the floor, and blindly groped through a new veil of fog for the couch again. He stumbled over the landlord's legs, and his hands touched the battered, bloody face.

The touch aroused the beaten man. He scrambled up with a curse, tried his legs, and staggered from the room, without a glance at Drake.

"Great Caesar!" gasped Drake. "See him go, after getting hammered like that! Glory! Any one of the wallops he got would just about kill me now, and see him go! Oh, Lord, my head!"

He began to doubt that he was entirely awake. Horrid red-splotted things whirled before his eyes. He felt his wrist. His wrist watch was undoubtedly gone. He had undoubtedly had it when dancing with Mag Parrot, for she had teased him about it, telling him that it was a sissified habit. She had coveted his ring, too. Startled, he regarded his fingers. The valuable ring was gone.

Now things grew clearer. He felt for his fob watch. That he still had, and it was running. The time was a little before nine o'clock.

Swiftly the fogs left his brain. Overhauling himself rapidly, he saw that his overcoat was gone, too, and his dinner

jacket. Coins jingled in his trousers pockets. He drew forth two copper pennies. His keys were gone.

"This is too much of a good thing!" he muttered, and marched through the door.

At the threshold he stopped, conscious of his incomplete attire; for a woman's voice came to him from along a passage—not the voice of a woman like Mag Parrot, but the cultured soft-toned voice of a girl.

Men's voices could be heard, too, and among them the hateful voice of Stevens—the voice which had uttered that scorching remark. Alden wanted to interview Stevens; but a gentleman could not face a lady at that hour of the morning in the quite inadequate remnants of a dinner suit. He drew back into the room, throwing the door shut after him, and lay down on the couch, his arms wrapped about his face.

He heard the voices speaking much nearer. He wondered what such a woman could be doing in that place, and was thankful that he had closed the door. The voices sounded so clearly that he peeped, in fear, and cold sweat broke out all over him, for the door had not shut. It stood halfway open, and in the passage three people walked slowly by—two men and a girl.

"So it's as well you were delayed over the men," a deep, puzzlingly familiar voice was saying. "I shouldn't have brought Mary into a den like this; but time is short, and you must sail to-day."

"Oh, please don't worry about me, daddy," answered the girl's voice. "It's fun! I wanted to see—oh, look!" The voice dropped to a stage whisper. "There's a man in there!"

Drake groaned silently. He wanted to take a square look at the owner of that voice. It was a rich, liquid, happy voice. It sent a queer ripple along his throat; but he dared not take his arms from his face. He knew, by the next voice, that they had passed on.

"All the men are aboard but one, Captain Manning." This was Stevens speaking. "I'll have a man in half an hour. The crimp tried to send me a putty dude." The fellow laughed discordantly—evidently playing to the girl, thought Drake. "If you saw it, Miss Mary, you'd want it for a dolly; but you'd have to wash it first."

"Are you speaking about a man?" came the girl's voice, cool and unappreciative.

Drake never could decide, even years later, whether the girl meant that to be



frosty, or was having fun with Stevens too deep for his understanding. Anyhow, at the moment, Drake cursed his luck all the more heartily because he dared not make himself known. He liked that girl. He forgot, or was forgetting, his deplorable situation. Stevens reminded him of it.

They were coming past the door again.

"Tried to dump the dude on me, sir. I hammered him well!"

"Who—the dude?" the girl queried sharply.

"Hush, child! Let Mr. Stevens get through. Time's short," cut in Captain Manning.

"The crimp," said Stevens. "I would feel like a child beater if I hit that double left-handed thing in silk striped pants that—"

"Yes, yes!" said the captain impatiently. "Never mind the dude. You get your ship warped out to the pierhead whether you have a full complement or not. You'll lose the rest, if you don't."

The trio were right at the door. Drake simply had to peep.

"I have done all that's needed in change of masters. You'll take the Orontes out to Batavia. Take good care of Mary, and see her safely to her brother's place. I'll get the business that's keeping me ashore all settled by the time you get back. Then we'll talk about what's to be done."

Drake's first peep showed him the gray-bearded, copper-bronzed old gentleman of nautical aspect whose fat chaise horses he had startled with his clanging gate. His next was more than a peep, for he raised his head and looked straight into the wide blue eyes of the girl who had handled those frightened horses.

He shuddered. He recalled the frosty blue of those eyes when turned upon him in swift indignation. He expected to see contempt there now. What he thought he saw, believed he saw, as the girl passed beyond sight, was the cloudy softness of pity.

It made him cringe with shame. He felt as if it were certain that she must recognize him. That he should recognize her seemed natural. Had he not been sharply attracted by her brown hair—the brown hair holding hidden golden glints? Had he not been fascinated by the potential depths of those ocean blue eyes that had turned so frostily upon him? Thus thinking, he could not, in his disturbed state of mind, see any reason why his own appearance

should not have been clearly impressed upon Miss Mary Manning.

He wanted, as he had wanted no other thing in life, to show that hatefully clean, self-possessed young lady that he belonged to a clean race, too; that he wanted none of her pity. He wanted to tell her something, too. He could still hear her voice. He could hear the deep, rumbling tones of her father, if Captain Manning was her parent, and the blatant, confident roar of Stevens.

He hated Stevens more than ever. Stevens, apparently, was to sail as master of the Orontes clipper, with Mary Manning as passenger—Stevens, a brute, a manhandler who set himself up a judge of a man's value as a man!

"He says I'm not even worth while shanghaiing! Caesar! I'd like to argue that with him!"

But how? Drake took steps to peep outside again. If he could just catch Stevens alone for a moment, with that girl out of the way, he would see! The big blond beast might batter a clumsy customer like the crimp, slow-moving, slow-thinking, a creature of one idea; but Drake had known the day when he could handle himself pretty well. He had licked the bully of the half deck on his first voyage to sea. There was nothing like confidence!

"So you'll get on board, Captain Stevens, and haul out to the pierhead before your crew jump," the old gentleman was saying. "Mary, my girl, take care of yourself. Have a good holiday with Jack, and he'll bring you home when he comes. I'll write you at Cape Town."

Drake followed stealthily. His hopes were dashed, for the three left the place together and walked briskly toward the docks. He stood on the sun-bathed pavement, staring after them, only becoming aware of his queer incongruity with the surroundings when an urchin planted himself right in front of him and bawled to other urchins to enjoy the curious spectacle. That drove him into movement.

"Calling in at the Cape!" he muttered, hurrying down the quieter side street.

He had no clear notion what to do; but, as he walked, his brain cleared completely. The sight of three gilded balls over a grimy window full of knives, pistols, sextants, ship models, and curios from all the Seven Seas rounded out a resolve which set his pulse bounding again.

He slipped inside. The shop stank of old clothes.

"How much, uncle?" he demanded, producing his gold fob watch.

"Where'd ye pinch it?" returned uncle, a jeweler's glass in one sharp eye alongside a battleship's ram of a beak.

"Don't be funny. How much?"

"It got a name in it. 'Tain't worth much. Give ye a 'arf quid, fob an' all."

"How much can I buy a suit of dungarees and a shirt for?"

"T'ree 'arf crowns."

Drake mentally calculated. He had to send a telegram.

"Give me a good pair of stout shoes for these togs and pumps, and we'll make the deal," he said. "I want the odd half crown in cash."

Rearranged in blue dungaree, shod with wooden-pegged shoes, still minus a cap, Drake almost ran until he found a telegraph office. There he spent fifteen precious minutes coding a message to his lawyer. After that he ran in good earnest through the dock gates, for he had seen the long jib boom, with the snowy furled jibs, slowly creep out of sight above the dock wall.

The Orontes was moving out to the locks. Drake mingled with the gang shifting her lines as she warped along. The movement, the smell of the ships, the sharp tang of the river, heated his blood. He hauled wet, heavy bowlines enthusiastically; but Lord, how soft he had grown! How his arms ached! How his breath caught! How flabby his calves felt after a long, hard haul!

All the while he was watching the ship. The girl on the poop seemed as much a part of the lovely clipper ship as her graceful figurehead. The skipper belonged, too, for all Drake's dislike for him. Jake Stevens was a sailorman. The half dozen perky youngsters, the apprentices, gave life to the picture; but the sullen, forlorn gang drearily tramping around the capstan presented a contrast indeed.

Drake grinned. There was the earringed sailor, looking far from sentimental. There were the two hot and lusty young fellows who had fought over the girl that had deserted both of them. They were there, black eyes, broken noses, and all.

That was not all. Drake laughed aloud, for there was fat little Joe Bunting, who was going to have a soft job lumping cargo, a bit gray about the gills, a bit slumping as

to shoulders, but more alive than any of the crew, stoutly heaving two men's weight on his capstan bar!

At the locks, some belated packages were slung aboard. The tug flew the white feather just outside the gates in the river. For a few minutes the shore gang were engaged aft. On the clipper's forecandle a smart first mate let up on his dreary gang, giving them a breathing space while the ship lay at rest. Bedraggled girls screamed ribald advice to scowling lovers of yesterday. Men hung about the forecandle rails, gazing wistfully at the shore.

Drake glanced about him. In a moment when restless seamen shifted places, he swung himself down on the bight of a mooring wire, clambered hand over hand to the mooring pipe, and dragged himself up and over the ship's side. He was panting painfully, his heart thumping, but he was elated.

He recalled his earlier knowledge of a ship's arrangements. He had no fear about being seen for a brief while, where all men were strangers. He knew there was only one man aboard who would be likely to know the men he had shipped, and that man, recently the mate, was now walking the poop as master.

A whistle shrilled out aft. The mate ran to the forecandle rail to answer, and Drake ducked and ran into the forecandle itself. Some steel ships, he knew, had a steel bowsprit which entered the forecandle through the bows, and was hollow to the big, wide heel. The Orontes had this. He wriggled into the convenient cavity like an eel, and lay there, palpitating jubilantly.

Overhead the dreary gang tramped the capstan around.

## V

CROUCHED in his narrow steel shell, Drake thrilled to the adventure into which he had hurled himself. He was still young enough in heart to thrill.

Every sound aboard the ship came to him amplified enormously. He heard the tramping, the bawling, the whistling. He heard the slapping of waters, the rush as the dock sluices were opened, the surging pressure of the big ship tautening to her lines.

Then the tramping ceased, the bawling became intermittent, the whistling like a solo, and he knew that the vessel was outside the lock, lying at the pierhead. Men

might be expected to sneak below for a smoke, or for a pull at a hidden bottle. He shrank as far into the bowsprit as he could get.

The forecastle remained quiet. Presently he heard the mate yelling at the men, driving them to jobs of clearing the running gear, ready for making sail when the ship got outside. Drake breathed more freely. He inhaled a deep breath, for the confines of his steel shell grew stuffy. Dry red lead dust tickled his throat and nostrils, like snuff. He snorted, and tried to reach his handkerchief, but he found his pocket and remembered that a handkerchief had not been included in uncle's bargain.

He sneezed. Thanked the stars there was nobody to hear! Then he started to sneeze again, and fought desperately to stop the explosion; for voices suddenly sounded appallingly near, at the forecastle door.

"Won't be fit for a lady to look into, once those hogs get settled down here," Captain Stevens was saying. "I'm rather proud of this ship's forecastle. It's the driest, roomiest, lightest forecastle I ever saw in a sailing ship. Wonder you never saw it before!"

"Oh, daddy never let me come forward," laughed Mary Manning. "It is a nice big place, isn't it? How many men live here? O-oh!"

"What the hell?" exclaimed Stevens, as Drake's strangled sneeze let go.

It sounded like a roar inside that steel cavern. In a moment Captain Stevens was on his knees, reaching with a long, steel-muscled arm that seemed, to Drake, to grow fathoms long. The hooklike fingers fastened upon his dungareed leg. He tried to fight, but another sneeze robbed him of strength. He was hauled out, still sneezing, to stand humiliated before those blue eyes that held the ocean depths in them.

Stevens stared hard at him; then swore fervidly:

"Why, it's you! Damn my eyes! Wait till I—"

"Who is it?" cried Mary, getting over her surprise, and regarding Drake with big, wide eyes.

"Who is it! Hell! It's the putty dude that crimp tried to—"

The skipper went to the forecastle door, shouting for the mate.

"I—beg—your—" stammered Drake, his eyes streaming.

Another paroxysm shook him speechless. He held his head in his hands, abashed before her.

In came the mate, bubbling over with the enthusiasm of a recent promotion.

"Mr. Twining," growled the skipper savagely, "take this out and run it ashore!"

"Gangway's in, sir," grinned Twining.

"Then dump him over the side! Get him out o' the ship!"

Sheer humiliation forced Drake to fight, although he could not see, and could scarcely hold up his head, which still ached. To think of this, before the blue-eyed woman who had dared to pity him! And then to have that hateful brute, Stevens, decline to stoop to put him ashore, but to call a lesser man to do the job! He clenched his fists and fought blindly.

"Oh, you don't mean to throw him into the water?" cried Mary.

"They can't! The pair of them can't!" panted Drake.

Twining, fresh, strong, full of pep, found that he could not do it alone.

"What call themselves men, nowadays?" growled Stevens, enigmatically, as he put his two powerful hands to the task.

A fit of sneezing overcame Drake at that inopportune moment. He was putty in truth, then. He was rushed outside, his knees were peeled cruelly on the coaming of the door. Stevens and Twining picked him up clear of the deck.

"We're a man short, sir," mentioned the mate, as they swung him.

"We'll get a man!" retorted Stevens. "One! Two!"

Alden Drake beat his way, half drowned, to the boat steps beside the lock gates. He still sneezed. Girls, who were getting tired of waving to unresponsive soreheads on the ship, ran and gathered around him. It was something new for a sailing ship to throw a man ashore just before sailing. The trouble was usually the other way, for men were anxiously sought for.

They chattered to him, but he never heard. He had stolen a glance at the ship. Mary Manning still leaned over the rail, her pink cheeks flushed with anger. He wanted to shout and tell her that he was all right, that he needed none of her pity. She could have heard him, for they were near enough, but he saved his breath.

As soon as he recovered, he would get away from the gathering girls. Their com-



ments embarrassed him. Some made him blush.

"Lord love me! Ain't it Mag's fancy bloke?" shrilled a keen-eyed beauty.

He stumbled to his feet and ran. He saw Mary vanish from the rail as that shrill voice broadcast its discovery.

In a corner of the docks, where the women would not be likely to follow him, Alden Drake sneezed his head clear of dust and tried to plan his next move. He had got aboard too easily that last time. It wasn't logical to expect simplicity; but he had paid heavily in the end—so heavily that his fighting blood was thoroughly heated. He would show that blue-eyed girl that he was a man, and would prove it upon the teeth of Captain Jake Stevens!

But first he had to stow himself away beyond fear of discovery. He had little time. Once the tug ranged alongside the tall clipper, he would almost surely have lost.

There was a grievous amount of activity about the Orontes. He watched the mate come ashore.

"Looking for a man!" Drake muttered sarcastically. "I don't look like a man to Captain Stevens! And I had my master's ticket when he—"

He halted that train of thought. It led nowhere.

"He's right!" he decided. "A man's only the man he is—not what he was. I'll ask him what I am, but I'll be no putty dude when I ask him, by Cæsar! And I want to see no pity in that girl's big eyes when he answers me, either!"

He shivered in his wet dungarees, but his eyes never left the glossy painted side of the Orontes. Far aloft on her royal yards men dragged the sails along and tied in the rovings, bent on the gear. Men at the five rails hauled sullenly at the lines that carried the canvas aloft. Little knots here and there; aft, a white coated steward carrying the last of the fresh stores below.

The forecandle head was deserted, except for an apprentice who was dipping a guy line over the head stays. At the bows a boatman sat in his wherry, holding on to the back ropes, waiting until he was needed again to carry out lines. One great anchor hung at the hawse pipe, almost in the water. That anchor would not be taken aboard and stowed for sea until the ship won outside the river.

The whole picture suddenly became vividly clear. Drake waited until the mate had gone out of sight. Then he ran as fast as he could go to where the boatman sat.

"Hey, mate!" he called gruffly. "Give me a shove over, will you? I've been ashore for a last half pint and almost lost the ship!"

"Was you the bloke the myte's gone a lookin' for?" asked the boatman.

Such escapades were common. He was at the steps even as he put the question.

"He'll be glad to see me all right!" grinned Drake, jumping into the boat. "Just let me get hold of the back ropes, matey. I don't want to be copped."

The boatman winked knowingly. He even hoisted Drake well up into the jib boom rigging.

"Good luck!" he uttered hoarsely, as Drake clambered over the forecandle rail and disappeared from view.

The mate returned, bringing no man with him. The skipper swore in disgust, but his tide book warned him against further delay.

"Pass the towline to the tug, and let's get out," he growled. "You'll be a man short in your watch, mister—that's all it amounts to."

The tug went ahead. Girls waved handkerchiefs and hats.

"So long, 'Arry! Bring us 'ome some fevers!"

"Don't fergit we got married this time, Joe! None o' yer old sailor's tricks, remember!"

"Fat pay day to yer, 'Erbert! Hey, Tony! What about my ring what you pinched last night? 'Erb, that swine pinched my weddin' ring what you give me! Git it off 'im—see!"

"Hey, Lousy! I 'opes you falls down from aloft an' busts yer bloomin' neck! You give me a dud 'arf quid, you lousy 'arf-breed!"

The ship moved out into the rolling river. Voices died in distance. The tug snorted powerfully on her way. Heavy-headed men dragged wearily at wet hawsers, coiling them to dry on the fore hatch.

A pair of sparkling blue eyes incessantly watched the teeming life of the river. A pair of keen black eyes incessantly watched the play of the fair face of which these blue eyes were the stars. Captain Stevens, proud as a peacock in his new command, paced his poop deck and secretly watched

the blue eyes, without a suspicion of the existence of the black.

A fresh easterly blew the Nore waters into yellow yeast. A fair wind—splendid portent! The skies were blue as Mary Manning's eyes. The land was green and gray in the sun, the sands yellow, the cliffs dazzling white.

"Get some sail on the ship, Mr. Twin-ing," ordered the skipper.

"Let fall yer lower tops'ls! Sheet home!" roared the mate.

A still younger second mate leaped among the sore-headed sailors, full of splendid young manhood and full of pride, too; for his promotion had been as unexpected as that of mate and master.

"Come, my lads! Sing out!" he yelled. "Hay-ay-hay!"

"Hay, hay, hay—what the bull eats!" growled a rusty voice from among the crowd.

"Make 'em haul, if they won't sing!" snapped the mate.

He burst in among the men, grabbing the rope on which they were hauling, and scattering them with cunning placement of knees and elbows, until they fell in behind and pulled.

"That 'll do the lee sheet! Sheet home to windward!"

It was a shameful thing for a grand steel clipper to put to sea without a song. Mary Manning had often sailed with her father, and she counted the sail setting chanties as one of the thrills of sailing ship life. But those wretched men refused to sing. Even when the great steel upper topsail yards were hoisted, they went up tunelessly, raggedly, slowly.

"Suffering saints! Can't one o' you Port Mahon sojers sing?" roared young Bill Adams, the second mate. Adams was a big, chesty, happy youth, all sailorman. "Come, bullies, give us a song! Come on! That tops'l yard must go up! Sing out, my lads!"

"Ho, times are 'ard, an' wages low!" fat Joe Bunting bawled manfully.

"Melia, where you bound to?" yelled Mr. Adams, alone.

"The Rocky Mountings is my 'ome!" Joe persevered.

"Come, bullies! Whoop her up!" urged the second mate. "Across the Western ocean!"

There was only an inarticulate grumble in response.

"I ain't no bloomin' steam horgan!" growled Joe Bunting, and fell as silent as the rest.

"What ails the men?" Mary asked, surprised. "I never saw such a sailing day!"

"Look over the men and answer your own question, Miss Mary!" snapped the skipper.

"Ye-es," she said. "That fat little man is the only one who seems to have any brains in his head. You shouldn't have thrown that stowaway overboard, captain. He at least looked intelligent."

Captain Jake Stevens stamped the deck in smoldering rage. He had set himself out to impress this girl, who had grown into a glorious woman since she last sailed on the Orontes. Getting command gave him all the feathers wherewith to strut; and here she was, telling him that she remembered the existence of a stowaway dungaree dude!

"Appearances don't mean much," he snapped.

"That's very true," she murmured sweetly. "I expect that stowaway might have measured up to the standard of bigger men, given his chance."

So the Orontes shook off her leading strings. Singing or songless, her crew dragged sail on her until she leaned grandly to the easterly breeze, a towering pile of canvas, full of amber lights and somber shadows, aglitter with glossy paint and shiny brasswork, shearing through white-capped little seas that sprayed her teasingly, rolling the blue-green water aside in tumbling, gleaming furrows.

Darkness came, and the Channel lights gleamed. Great liners blazoned the sea with their garish lights. One swept flauntingly by, so close that her orchestra could be heard aboard the Orontes. One lone homing clipper spoke eloquently of the passing of the days when the seven seas were her own domain. The apprentice on watch struck the time; four bells clanged out from the fore-castle bell; and the sonorous saloon gong rumbled and boomed under the deft strokes of Ike Saintly, steward.

"Let me take you down to supper, Miss Mary," the captain smiled.

He was all prepared to shine. A brand-new uniform gave him confidence. Let him get firmly settled in that great swivel chair at the table head, and he would take such a hold of things that this saucy miss would

have to realize that she was not a captain's daughter, but just a plain passenger.

## VI

Drake lay snug on a heap of canvas in the sail locker. Right opposite was the half deck. He watched the apprentices get their supper, and chuckled amusedly at their after employment. Last voyage's greenhorns were now the oracles for the first voyagers. Staid, mature old seadogs of two or more voyages dared to smoke pipes, and commanded their juniors to desist from the manly habit.

Well he knew that half deck life! He had lived it; and boys were boys, all the world over and forever. He could hear some things that were said. His sail room door was wide open, and no more than twenty feet from the half deck. The evening was calm and serene, the ship made no more fuss than a musical tinkling of running seas and cheery chirrup and rattle of gear aloft.

It was the dog watch, when sailors relax; but the first watches of the Orontes had not been set yet. The men were too sore to do anything but sprawl and curse, waiting for the mates to choose their gangs.

"Me son, when you've been to sea as long as I have, you can smoke," a bold, deeply browned lad of eighteen was saying to an awe-struck greenhorn who had dared to produce a cigarette.

Drake enjoyed that. He remembered hearing the same thing on his first voyage, years ago. That mature apprentice of eighteen was laying down good old stock maxims of the half deck.

"Get the mast color off your legs, m'lady; grow hair on your chest; learn to roar like Barney's Bull and spit solid; then you'll be by way of making a sailor. If I catch you blowing the weed before that, I'll have to put the strop to you—savvy?"

The lad came out on deck to ponder over the warning. Drake was going to step out of his refuge. The mere sight of a smoking pipe set him craving. He had not missed his brier pipe before, in the excitement of the day; but now he felt that he would dare all for just one pipeful of strong plug.

He cautiously opened the door. He knew that the boy would know nothing about shipboard ways, and would see nothing queer about a sailor emerging from the sail locker. With his hand on the handle ring, Drake thrust out his head.

He drew it back so swiftly that he almost cracked it upon the steel jamb. The two mates were at the poop rail, right above his head. They were talking business—nothing particular, but just the matter-of-fact affairs of a ship on sailing day.

Their presence kept Drake a prisoner. They spoke briefly of the supper they had eaten. The happiness of a sailing ship depends so much upon the scale of feeding that no sailor, be he foremast Jack or afterguard, even pretends to be indifferent.

"If we carried lady passengers all the time, there would be no getting a berth in sail," said Mr. Adams. "The steward done himself proud to-night. Did you try the kidney stew, sir?"

Drake suddenly felt hungry. It was not a pipe he craved, but kidney stew—he was sure now.

"Ike Saintly can set a table fit for kings, when he likes," replied Mr. Twining.

The first mate's inner man might delight in kidney stew, but his new dignity forbade discussion of such things with his junior. It wasn't so long since he was only a second mate, either; but that's the sea's way. The man his mates call by some offensive nickname one day may have to be addressed as "mister" the next.

"Is Miss Mary coming home with us, too?" pursued Mr. Adams. He did not suspect that he had such a keenly eager audience just out of sight. "Hope she is! She's a jolly sort. Did you see her wink while you were at table? Boy! She tipped Ike a wink as she told him to pass the pie to the old man for the third time while I was there. How many whacks did he skoff while you—"

"Mr. Adams, you will please not discuss the captain or his passengers," said the mate. "You will find work enough about the ship, if you're going to make as good a second mate as I was."

"I'll bet she has some fun with Jake, though!" retorted the irrepressible Adams, as he stepped down the winding poop ladder to smoke a pipe in the waist, waiting for the bell.

While he was there, Drake had to remain hidden. The men forward clustered at the fore hatch. The lads in the half deck put on their jackets and caps. The rattle of dishes in the saloon had ceased. The time-keeper on the poop stood by the big bell, waiting to be told to strike eight bells. Everybody seemed to be impatient to know



who must stand watch for the next four hours, and who might roll into a sweet four-hour slumber.

Drake heartily cursed that second mate. Why couldn't he pick some other place to smoke?

From the sheep pen amidships came the bleat of sheep, suddenly aware of the instability of the new environment. In the galley, the doctor thumped away at the dough for the morrow's bread. Drake was hungry—hungrier every minute. Something always cropped up to suggest food—second mate's praise, bleating sheep, kneading bread. He was tobacco starved, too; and there was the confounded second mate blowing billows of hearty smoke to windward, so that the swirling incense crept in through the circular brass ventilator in the sail room door.

But suddenly Drake's hunger evaporated. He no longer cared anything about smoke. At the rail above, Mary Manning's voice rippled merrily, and her hearty laughter leaped aloft in the sleeping breasts of the gleaming sails.

"I want to see watches picked again," she said. "It is so interesting to watch how a new crew shapes up!"

"The only interesting thing about crews, nowadays, is how they happened to be the only cattle out of jail just when a ship needed men," Captain Stevens stated emphatically. "But stay if you wish, Miss Mary."

Drake felt an almost irresistible impulse to go forth and confront this new skipper who broadcast such opinions about sailormen. He wondered how the girl was taking that. Then the big poop bell clanged eight sonorous strokes, and the mate blew his whistle.

"Let the hands muster, boson!" he bawled.

The men and boys came trooping, the men clustering at the break of the poop, the lads going up. Captain Stevens walked aft, leaving his mates to divide the men. There were boatswain, and carpenter, and cook; they answered to their names. Then the sailmaker, and next the able seamen, one by one.

"Tony Fernando!"

"Here!"

"Henry Hall!"

"Ere, sir!"

"Joe Bunting!"

"All alive, oh!"

"What's that?" snapped Mr. Twining, peering down into the vague crowd.

"I'm 'ere, sir," wheezed Joe cheerfully.

"Just lettin' you know I'm alive, sir."

"I'll find that out for myself! If you're not, you'll damned soon wish you were dead! I want no slack from the rest of you!"

The names were called down to the end. There was no response to the last one called. Drake suddenly remembered that the ship had sailed one man short. The mate apparently had forgotten, too. He called again:

"Peter Finch!"

"That's the man that cleared out," the second mate volunteered.

Drake, stepping out into the crowd like a shadow, answered:

"Peter Finch—here, sir!"

"Oh, you are, hey?" snarled the mate, stooping low over the rail to look. "You been stowed away sleeping, hey?"

"Yes, sir," said Drake, tingling with pride in his swift move.

Mary Manning laughed merrily overhead. She had watched the milling of the men, the shambling movement across the deck, as they answered to their names. Some had passed across the light that poured from the saloon ports, and she had watched the play of the light on the different faces. She wanted to see this cheerful rebel.

"Oh, you have?" the mate cried. "Let's see you! Step up!"

"Please hurry up and set the watches, Mr. Twining!" said the captain impatiently, walking forward to find what caused the delay.

He wanted to show Mary the shore lights, to point out to her the things which a sailor knows, and which he thinks everybody else would give an eye to know. He slipped a hand inside the girl's arm. She gave him no more notice than if he were a rail stanchion, so intent was she upon the study of human types.

"We're not a man short, sir," the mate said. "Finch has been stowed away all day, skulking."

"Get the watches picked and set! Never mind Finch now. You can give him some wake-up medicine some other time. He won't jump overboard, mister!"

"He'll wish he had!" growled Mr. Twining significantly.

He proceeded, with the second mate, to pick watches. That done, and the helms-

man and lookout relieved, he gave the order:

"Go below, port watch!"

The big ship was fairly embarked.

Drake mingled with the sailors going forward. Joe Bunting was in the mate's watch, too. Joe would be a good man to cultivate. He overtook the fat little red man at the fore fife rail.

"Hullo, Joe!" he laughed, and clapped the cheery little sailor heartily on his broad back.

Joe was putting a light to a grimy inch of clay pipe. The match flared up as Drake's thump jarred him.

"What the 'ell you playin' at? Playin' the giddy goat, ain't you? Hullo! Blimy, what's the gyne?"

The ruffled tones sank to a guarded wheeze as the match light shone upon Drake's grinning countenance. Blank astonishment rendered Joe's round red face vacant for an instant; then a slow, friendly grin spread all over it, even to the ears.

"Lor' lu'me, Mr. Drake," he said, "you don't look so—"

"Shut up! I'm Peter Finch, until they find out. I thought you had got a shore job, Joe."

"And I thought you 'ad come into money," wheezed Joe. "See what comes of makin' too sure of anythink! I didn't see—"

He stopped outside the little room shared by the boatswain and the carpenter and stared at Drake in the yellow lamplight, just for a moment, before the lamp was extinguished.

"Hey, was you the bloke they hove overboard in dock? Was you? Blimy, I knowed you wasn't with the crowd as signed on in the cabin."

"I wasn't; but here I am, Joe, and they won't put back to dump me out. As soon as the pilot goes off, I'll see the old man. Just now I'm starving, and bedless, and I want a smoke so badly I'd sign away my pay day for that inch of clay you're chewing to chalk."

"Come on!" said Joe, and they entered the forecabin.

Already the big forecabin rumbled with the sheering bow wave. Sleepers added their own note. The bright new kerosene lamp on the bulkhead was turned low. With the easy motion of the ship, clothes swung from their pegs with a sibilant swish.

In the after end of the port forecabin

Joe Bunting had chosen his bunk. The only other bunk vacant was far forward. Beneath Joe's bunk lay Tony Fernando, already dreaming of his next pay day. Joe seized him by the breast of his shirt.

"Come on out o' that, *hombre!* Shake a leg! Rise an' shine!"

"Wotta da mat'? Time for turn out so soon?" stammered Tony, rubbing heavy eyes.

Joe was rummaging through his pockets for a stub of pencil. He found it while yet Tony struggled with sleep, and scribbled a straggling "Peter Finch" on the lee board.

"Come on, me son! Show a leg! You're in the wrong pew—that's all. You're in me mate's bunk. Shunt out o' it, slippy!"

"I geev you a t'ick ear, you!" snarled Tony, justifiably angry at being roused.

"Dees my bunk, an' you go to hell—see?"

"Let him stay," whispered Drake, for other men were rousing at the noise, muttering oaths and horrid threats. It is a grievous sin to break the sleep of a watch below.

"Me mate's name's wrote on it—see?" wheezed Joe inexorably.

He hauled at the furious occupant, and drew him from the bunk so smoothly that Drake stared in amazement, wondering where the little man's tremendous strength came from. And, though Tony fought like a terrier, Joe took him by the neck and pushed his face down for him to read "Peter Finch" on the lee board.

"See? Now git yer dunnage out o' here quick!"

Tony spat like a wet cat. His teeth agleam with grinning rage, he grabbed his belt, which hung on the bunk stanchion, and whipped out his sheath knife.

"Here, here! None of that!" cried Drake, thrusting forward.

Joe wheezed to him to keep clear, then coolly gripped Tony's knife hand, twisted it cruelly until the weapon dropped, and grappled with the man. Picking him up like a bag of potatoes, he heaved him headlong into the vacant bunk. Then he dragged out all his bedding and gear and threw them in on top of him.

"What's all this here racket?" growled an awakened sailor.

"Tony drew a knife," wheezed Joe.

"Kick the dirty dago's slats in, then!"

"You've made an enemy," Drake muttered, as Joe hauled out a blanket from his

own bunk and pitched it into "Peter Finch's."

"What do you care? You got a bunk, 'aven't you?" grinned Joe. "Dunno what you're goin' to do about grub, though. Ain't started sea whack yet. Ain't nothink left from supper. I got a noo pipe, though."

Drake took a smoke for his supper. He lay in his bedless bunk, with nothing but Joe's sea bag for his pillow, and smoked luxuriously, while every other man slept. There was a sweet air coming through the door. The ship was sailing serenely before a fair fresh breeze that listed her over just enough to be pleasing. He felt wakeful. Joe's plug and pipe enabled him to wreath himself in smoke clouds and form pictures—that old habit of his.

He fell to pondering whether he had left anything undone in embarking upon this mad voyage. His affairs were efficiently handled by the family lawyer. His household ran smoothly under Aunt Angelina's guidance—would run all the smoother in his absence, no doubt. But had he said all that was necessary in that carefully worded telegram? Lack of funds had limited his message; but he believed he had covered everything. If he had—the mere thought of what would happen sent him into an ecstasy of chuckling mirth.

Drake was still forming smoke pictures when the watch was called to turn out at midnight.

"Shake a leg, me salty sons!" bawled the sailor calling them. "Now, me sons, resurrection mornin'! The pilot's gone, an' the bloomin' 'ooker's lost if you don't 'urry up an' tyke care of 'er! Shake a leg!"

Drake mustered at the break of the poop with the watch. As the second mate called the names over, the skipper came to the rail. He had seen the pilot off, had taken a departure from a prominent shore light then abeam, and was ready to turn in. Being a careful man, sailing his first command out of the crowded fairway of the Channel, he wanted to be sure of his helmsman.

As the men responded to their names, and moved aside, the skipper played the beam of a flash light over their faces, looking for the likely man. To-morrow the men themselves would arrange wheel tricks and lookouts; to-night a man would be chosen by the watch officer and approved by Captain Stevens.

"You, Bunting, relieve the wheel," said

Mr. Adams. The flash light flickered over Joe's placid face. "And you, there—"

Adams pointed into the darkness, at a momentary loss for the name; and the skipper's flash light, seeking out the new lookout, fell full upon the startled face of Alden Talbot Drake.

Drake could see nothing behind the glare; but he heard words that prepared him for swift calamity.

## VII

"MISTER, send another man on lookout," the skipper said grimly. "Come here, you dude!"

Drake stood before the big blond man with a curious feeling of elation. Joe Bunting passed to the wheel, the man he relieved passed forward to turn in, and another man was sent to the fore-castle head. Mr. Twining walked aft, and Drake and the captain were alone at the forward poop rail, in the shadow of the mizzen course.

Drake expected to hear an interesting opinion of himself, expressed in vivid sailor-ese; but Jake Stevens had no such facility of speech in that pregnant moment. Everything that had occurred between them rose before him in a gaudy panorama.

Drake was merely a stowaway, at first; but there was the earlier irritation, when the fatuous crimp had tried to foist him upon Stevens as a seaman. Finding him a stowaway, after that, had made the captain see red. He had hurled the fellow out of the ship in orthodox style, with only a feeling of contempt for the flabby specimen he seemed to be.

The ship had sailed lacking an able seaman—which was an annoyance in itself, when crews were cut to the limit of man power. Mary Manning had criticized the captain for his treatment of the dude. That was the nub of the matter! A man would not be master in his own ship any longer, if a chit of a girl were to be permitted to give out her opinions—especially opinions which showed bias for such a thing as this stowaway.

And now the fellow popped up again, brazenly taking the name of a signed-on seaman, hiding behind another man's identity in the darkness. A common stowaway might be set to work peeling potatoes, or scrubbing the fore-castle, and no doubt his food would be well paid for that way; but this jack-in-the-box—

"Come here, you!" growled Stevens, and



fastened a grip like a steel trap on Drake's jacket.

Drake struck sharply at the captain's hand. He had learned all about the sanctity of the master on shipboard. He knew it from experience, and believed in it, for it was essential to discipline; but he had too recently been his own master, and master of men and affairs, to suffer a personal attack with lamblike submission. He had fought all he knew when they hurled him overboard. He was sure, even with the captain's iron grip at his breast, that neither of the two men who ejected him could have done it alone.

He struck a heavy blow at the skipper's hand with the edge of his own hand, and was dumfounded because it did not loosen the other man's grip in the slightest degree. Stevens laughed savagely, and shook Drake until his teeth chattered.

"Fight, will you? When I get through, you'll wish you'd been drowned in the dock! A dress suit gentleman, are you? Went slumming and got drunk, hey? What did you steal that drove you to my ship, you putty-faced whelp?"

While he hissed the words, he shook his prisoner so tremendously that there was no possibility of defense. Drake was amazed at such strength. He tried to strike a blow, but his fists would not clench. He felt actual alarm, for the big white face so near his own was ugly with cold passion. He kept on trying to strike a blow, and once his knuckles brushed a bony chin; but it did not stem the torrent of vituperation or halt that terrific shaking.

"Do you know what I'm going to do with you, you rat? I'm going to shake all your in'ards loose, and—"

Drake suddenly wrenched free, leaving some buttons in Stevens's grasp. He forgot all considerations of discipline and rank in the glorious thrill of one solid, snappy punch that landed flush on the skipper's square jaw and set him on his heels.

Surprise had a lot to do with his success, and its effect lasted only for a second or two. Drake struck once again—a straight left-hand jab to the mouth, which drew blood. He knew it drew blood, for he felt the grinning lips burst; but he knew little after that. A terrible, snorting face came close to his own, two triphammer fists drove through his defense as if he were a ten-year-old boy, and after one agonizing moment when he believed his breastbone was

cracked, he felt exquisite serenity stealing over him and relinquished himself to it gladly.

When he shivered into consciousness, he was drenched with salt water, and the dark face of Tony Fernando hung over him. Another seaman of the watch was near, but it was Tony who showed interest in his coming to. Tony was smiling a toothsome, bright-eyed smile.

"Ha! You wake up, ha? I t'eenk you no wake proper yet!"

Drake was going to ask what had happened. Tony drew back, dashed a bucketful of hissing brine into his face, and leaned forward again, smiling still.

"You taka my bunk, ha?" he said gently. "I t'eenk you no wake proper—"

"Hey, hold yer luff, dago!" cut in the other sailor, taking the bucket from Tony. "You wasn't told off to drown him. How d'ye feel, feller?"

Tony drew aside, chattering to himself. Drake sat up.

"Did he chuck me overboard?" he asked vaguely.

"He was goin' to, only that girl come on deck, complainin' of some noise over her head as kept her from sleepin'. He told off Tony and me to drag you for'ard and souse water over you, to wake you up. What did he manhandle you for?"

"I think he didn't like my face—or my name," Drake grinned painfully.

His face and body felt as if he had been sucked through a dredger. When he drew breath, a terrific pain stabbed his vitals. He felt himself over, a little bit afraid.

"Dunno about yer name, matey, but he made a poultice of yer mug!" the sailor said, with a humorous chuckle.

Drake grinned, too, though it pained him to do so. He had to grin. The man was a dwarf in height, with heavy black brows that hung over beady black eyes and a splendidly broken nose. He ought to talk about looks, thought Drake! But the brief glance he had of the man showed a pair of shoulders and arms that belonged to a bigger man than Stevens.

Drake recognized him now. It was the broken-nosed dwarf who, back in the Sailortown dive, had asked Stevens if he had been dragged up where doors were unknown.

"I rather think he did make a mess of me," said Drake. "I didn't believe any man could do it so well."

"You'd better believe as Cap'n Stevens can. Take the advice of a damned fool, matey, an' fergit all about it. What you was babblin' about when Tony hove the fust bucket o' water over you—"

"What? Have I said anything?" Drake was fully alert now. He might have said something better unsaid.

"Said enough to get another hammerin', if the old man heard it. Talked some sort o' slush about bein' skipper o' this ship one day, an' tellin' Mr. Captain Stevens what your ideas of a man was. Course, you was only talkin' through yer bonnet, but that ain't fattenin' palaver, matey."

"It isn't! Thanks, shipmate—you're all right. What time is it?"

"Gone four bells. You was out nigh two hours. Feel all to the good now? I'll keep deck for you if you want to coil down somewheres."

"Thanks. I may have to stand lookout, or wheel."

"Not you!" the dwarf laughed. "You got a long way to go before you gets to be skipper o' this fine ship, me son! You don't stand no lookout, ner no wheel. You're goin' to sign on boy in the mornin'. The old man told the mate so."

Alden Drake was placed on the ship's articles as "boy," and it was poor consolation he got from the sight of the skipper's bruised lips. He met Stevens's hard eyes with a smile, but was surprised to get no rise in response.

Captain Stevens, in fact, looked quite satisfied with himself as he put away the articles, which bore Alden Drake's signature on the last line. He made no comment about the change of names. Drake signed his real name, after due consideration. He might have given another, had he been able to think of a suitable one, but he didn't want to use the name of a man who really existed; so he entered under his own, and felt rather thrilled about it.

He was starting at the bottom. Ever since that astoundingly easy beating he had suffered, he wanted more than ever to argue out the matter of superiority with Jake Stevens. Since that was his aim, he felt that it mattered little from what point he started.

Had he really been dependent upon the rapidity of promotion for his career, he might have felt differently about this thing of being rated as ship's boy—he, who not

only held a master's ticket, but had sailed in command. He smiled again into the skipper's face as he thought of that. The fact that Captain Stevens smiled back at him only came to his mind much later.

"Go to the cook, and he'll put you to work," the captain said.

"Aye, aye, sir," said Drake, and went.

He was a bit disappointed in his first job. He had not thought of being put to work in the galley. Rather he had hoped to have to clean the poop brasswork. That would be fine! He could watch Mary Manning's face, and perhaps even speak to her.

But he was willing to wait. It is a long voyage for a sailing ship to the Cape of Good Hope, and a longer one to Batavia. He could afford to wait a few days. He reported to the doctor.

"I've come to peel spuds, doctor," he said, with a smile.

"Ho, no, you ain't!" grinned the cook. "I got a fine job all ready for you, me son! You get in behind the stove there an' clean out the soot. That's the job the old man told me to give you; an' he said I was to tell him if you jibbed or talked back. So heave ahead, me lad!"

It was early in the forenoon. Drake sweated behind the hot stove, on which bubbled the soup and beef for the men's dinner. Every now and then he carried out a bucket of soot and clinker to dump over the lee rail; and then he was devoutly thankful that Mary Manning kept out of sight.

He envied the rest of the watch. They had nothing more to do than coil away hawsers, clear away harbor litter, and sweat up sheets and halyards after the night dews evaporated.

"Hello, Rastus!" a cheeky apprentice greeted him on his fifth or sixth excursion to the rail. "What time does the minstrel show begin?"

He had felt that he was getting a bit grimy. There was no mirror, and the doctor's pans had not acquired that lustrous polish which sometimes serves; but the boy's greeting hinted at a degree of dirtiness far beyond Drake's fears. He hurried to finish the job. He hoped that he would have a chance to wash before starting on something else.

As he took out his last bucket of soot, an apprentice climbed down from the standard compass with his tin of brass cleaning gear. The lad grinned in Drake's face; but before

the obvious remark was uttered, the second mate sang out from the poop:

"You, Sammy!"

The apprentice turned aft, his mouth open.

"Yes, sir."

"Give your brass rags to the boy—yes, that black fellow. Who'd ye think? You, Drake, come aft and get busy on the poop brasswork!"

Drake hesitated. He had seen the flutter of a white skirt aft. He felt as if he simply could not obey; but if he refused to go aft, it would be insubordination. He would probably be confined in the forepeak.

He wondered, too. He had fought with the captain—an act of mutiny, and nothing had come of it. Then, again, had nothing come of it? What was this humiliating drudgery, if not some cunning punishment deliberately designed to flay him to far greater depths than mere physical hurt?

Had he thought Stevens meant to follow such tactics, he would have planned his own conduct differently. Even now he might have to tell the big blond bully something he had not meant to say for some time to come. There was something in tackling the heavier odds.

He had not reckoned on facing such humiliation, however. Doubt ruled him.

"Boy!" roared Mr. Adams. "Get a move on you!"

A grin of good-natured amusement played at the corners of the second mate's eyes. Drake suddenly made up his mind to face it. He walked aft with his brass rags and his tin of brickdust and oil, with his head up and his sooty face turned squarely upon the world.

He started with the brass plate that held the patent log. His back was toward the two deck chairs that stood by the saloon skylight.

Then he had to come to the wheel, to polish the big brass boss and the inset brass rim. Stealing a glance at the deck chairs, he grew hot at the sight of Stevens's sneering face. Mary Manning was reading a book, her fair face rosy red, her blue eyes ever upon the printed page. The skipper was talking, but she appeared not to hear.

Her color deepened as Drake finished the wheel and went to the skylight to remove the rods. She got up. Stepping into the companionway, she said:

"Captain Stevens, I'll come on deck when the work is done. My father would

never permit the poop brasswork to be neglected until mid forenoon. Neither would he tolerate working the ship's boys to a point where there was no time for personal cleanliness."

Drake stooped to hide a grin. He felt the hot flush of shame surge through him; but he could grin, for Captain Stevens's face turned red, and the bruised lips opened and hung open, as the girl vanished with the air and step of an offended princess.

"Mr. Adams!"

The second mate turned, barely succeeding in hiding the broad smile that suddenly brightened his pleasant face.

"Mr. Adams! Send this confounded boy for'ard and have a couple of hands scrub him! Get him out o' my sight, d'ye hear?"

"Lay for'ard, my son," ordered Adams, with terrible gravity. It was all he could do to preserve that gravity before the old man. It was terrible, perforce. "Get some hot water from the galley, and—"

"I've drawn no slops, sir. I have neither soap nor towel," said Drake loudly.

In a lower tone he begged the second mate not to order men to scrub him. That was an indignity only forced upon the dirtiest of habitually dirty ship's boys. Mr. Adams knew it, and was all against doing it, but it was an order.

"Run along now," he warned. "Get the water, and send the boson aft to me."

The boatswain was ordered to tell off two men for the scrubbing. He selected Tubbs and Sims, the hot and lusty young gladiators who had fought over the fickle lass ashore. He chose them because they looked to be scrappers, and the boatswain didn't share anybody's pity for the ship's boy. A ship's boy was a ship's boy, to old Jack Gadgett. All were dirty, all were cheeky, all were imps straight out of hell until they were men enough to draw tobacco.

"I warn you fellows you'll lay no brush to me!" Drake told them, as they stood waiting for him to strip.

"Wyte an' see!" grinned young Sims.

"Watch us!" growled Tubbs.

Drake stripped off his shirt, and before it was out of his hands they grabbed him. He fought furiously. The bucket of water flew. The old boatswain stepped in and lent a powerful hand, scooping up water in his horny hands and rubbing soap dry over such parts of Drake's skin as he could reach while the men staggered in fight.



The skipper had gone below. The second mate enjoyed himself hugely on the poop. He almost cheered when Drake knocked his handlers headlong into the lamp room. Then Bill Gadgett got a grip, the seamen came back, and Drake felt the effects of the beating of the night before. He went down fighting; but he was scrubbed white, and scrubbed well.

His face was clean, but the bitterness in his soul was more bitter than gall. He had grown soft in a shameful life of ease. Any one of these men, at present, was a better man than he. That girl, whose fresh face and blue eyes never left his memory, whose gold-glinting brown hair haunted him when-

ever he saw the sunlight to remind him of it, instead of revealing in those deep blue eyes any interest in him as a fellow man, or a man at all, showed only pity for him—pity as for some humble creature of lower estate!

A greater impulse governed him now than had brought him on board the *Orontes*. He had wanted to show Stevens that he was man enough for one of his crew. He had, of course, wanted to be near to Mary Manning, to become acquainted with her. Now he wanted first of all to win back to the full manhood that had been his in the days before he chose a life of ease. After that, such a man need know no limitations.

*(To be continued in the July number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)*

### ONLY A PICTURE ON THE WALL

SHE that was once a girl so fair,  
Bright as new gold, as ivory  
Her heaving breast, her falling hair  
Living as light—ah, where is she  
That had dominion over me,  
And many another held in thrall?  
Lo, she is scarce a memory—  
Only a picture on the wall.

Thrice broken heart because of her,  
Whose sorrow was felicity,  
No news this many a drifting year  
Comes of her face on land or sea.  
How came so fair a thing to be,  
Then to such deep oblivion fall?  
A shadow smiling shadowly—  
Only a picture on the wall.

Fashioned with such mysterious care,  
With so divine a symmetry,  
Gone like a song upon the air,  
Fled where all lovely things must flee;  
Flaming with immortality,  
Now nothing left of her at all—  
Only this phantom imagery,  
Only a picture on the wall.

#### ENVOI

Time, thou abhorred iniquity,  
So young she was, so magical!  
Ah, once she was so good to see—  
Only a picture on the wall.

*Richard Le Gallienne*

# The House That Would Not Awake

THE MYSTERY THAT LONG BAFFLED THE QUIET TOWN OF  
STE. FÉLICE

By Leslie Gordon Barnard

NIGHT, which had brought the coolness that gives to Ste. Félice, even in summer, the boon of sleep under coverlets, gave place to the warming flush of dawn. Smoke ascended from the generous chimneys of farmhouses, and in the barns and about the yards men began another long day of labor—and another long week, for it chanced to be Monday.

In the town itself the movement was slower. The blinds of the shops were still closely drawn. Wispis of smoke showed above a few of the more modest dwellings. The larger houses of the square—a residential touch in a spot commercialized by the meager stores and spiritualized by a church—would be the last to waken.

Behind rusted iron railings and dusty hedges, six houses slept with the dignity of sleepers who need obey no workaday call. Five of them stood in a row, beginning with M. Roubaix's and ending with Notary Guidon's. Then came a space, recently transformed into a drive for the notarial motor car, a hedge, a driveway comprehending a circle, and in the circle the sixth house, where dwelt M. Clément—in loneliness, since his mother's death.

The square came slowly to life. Shopkeepers' assistants gossiped over the letting down of awnings. The five houses in the solid row opposite yawned in windows and doors and bestirred themselves. The sixth remained sleeping.

The sun peeped boldly over the maples in front of the house, and stared into the upper windows. At eleven o'clock, M. Cambert sent his Marcil to the door, with the usual supplies, and was rewarded with news that no response came to insistent ringing.

"He has slept late," declared M. Cambert, "being without servants this weekend. The man Franck and his wife are away for the marriage of her sister. Try again in half an hour."

Marcil obeyed, but again there was no answer.

M. Cambert rubbed his hands nervously. Was it not almost luncheon time, and the provisions still in the basket? Would it be politic to step to the public telephone station at the chemist's and attempt communication? He nerved himself to it. Still no answer!

He summoned Lafitte, the chemist, and they summoned Bourgie, the bootmaker, and held solemn consultation.

"It is odd," protested M. Bourgie gloomily. "I should call *monsieur le maire*."

This was done. M. Valier was brought from the modest house, where, nevertheless, the great Laurier himself had once entered.

"You are certain M. Clément is not away?" they were asked.

"But yes, *monsieur le maire*. Last night I saw lights until late, and the nightcap of *monsieur* as he closed a window a little while before the lights went out."

"True—and he was at mass yesterday," said the *maire*.

The deputation crossed the square. They rang at the front and at the back, awaking jangling echoes within. M. Bourgie fetched an instrument from his shop, and pried open a window.

"There is death inside!" he declared fearfully, standing aside with a shrug. "I have done my part."

The *maire* entered, followed by M. Cambert, whose provisions were at stake. In

the breakfast room a table had been set for *monsieur* against a servantless morning. Some letters, in his handwriting, already sealed and stamped, lay unposted on a hall table. Upstairs the bed was made ready for sleep, but no sleeper had troubled its immaculate condition.

Nowhere in the house were signs of disorder that spoke of violence. In the small sitting room above was M. Clément's ash tray by his favorite chair, where he never failed to sip his mild concoction of punch before retiring each night. There were the usual ashes upon the tray. Everywhere was evidence of continuing life, but no living thing was to be seen.

M. Cambert stood shaking his head, blinking his owl-like eyes, rubbing his hands, and repeating:

"Some terrible ill has befallen him. Alas, and he owed me a whole fortnight's account!"

"He would not flee from that," declared the practical Lafitte. "Perhaps he was suddenly called away."

"I have already inquired," said M. Cambert glumly, "but to no effect. Besides, his own car is in the garage still."

"Ah!" said the *maire*, gravely, and stooping suddenly.

They were, at the time, in M. Clément's sitting room. He held up a lump of clay-like earth. They followed him silently, as he searched further. The hallway yielded two or three small lumps, the stairway more than a trace. Still further evidences marked the lower hallway and the otherwise immaculate kitchen.

"It rained last night," said the *maire*, "but M. Clément has long since learned to wipe his feet. I will report the matter to the right authorities. Let us leave everything as it is."

They went out silently, closing such shutters as they had opened, nailing up the window they had forced, leaving the house quiet, empty, asleep in the noon sunlight.

## II

THAT is an August picture that I have reconstructed, but it was not until late October that I happened into Silcox's office one day, to ask him some little point of law.

"Just the man I'm looking for," he said. "Come north with me for a week or so. Place called Ste. Félice—bit of fishing, maybe, and possibly other diversions."

On the train he related briefly the incident that I have told in detail, and added:

"It's going on three months since that. The country has been scoured for him, but without result. The man Franck and his wife are innocuous people, and have a perfect alibi. M. Clément was not known to have enemies. His banker reports nothing unusual. None of the local railway officials can furnish any clew, for he boarded no local trains. All possible methods of conveyance have been investigated, and M. Clément was a notably poor pedestrian; so there you are!"

"How about under the house itself?" I suggested. "I seem to remember that the solution of one of Poe's mysteries lay in a cat that—"

"Morbid fellow!" laughed Silcox. "The authorities thought of that, and made a bootless investigation; so there we are again."

"And your connection?" I asked.

He smiled, and pulled out a letter bearing a Canadian postage stamp and a Ste. Félice postmark.

"You forget I practiced law first in Montreal. During that time I handled, for M. Clément, some minor legal affairs such as fell to the lot of a junior. He conceived a certain regard for me."

Silcox opened the letter.

"This happens to have been written just before his disappearance. You will recall the letters the *maire* found in the hallway? This is one of them. M. Cambert, probably thinking to do a good turn to his patron, who might yet turn up and require fleshly provisioning, slipped them into his pocket and mailed them at the first opportunity. You will observe that this is addressed to me personally, in care of my old firm. By one of the perversities of life that make existence interesting, it fell into the hands of an office boy of a generation that knew not Joseph. He laid it aside, with others that created mental problems for him, and speedily forgot it. After he had been fired for other more noticeable inefficiencies, the letter was discovered and forwarded to me. You may read it. You understand French, don't you?"

It was couched in that language, and the following is a free translation:

MY DEAR M. SILCOX:

Your care and courtesy in previous matters makes me turn to you, after these years, for further aid. You may recall the fact of drawing



my will for me, leaving my estate in stated portions to certain relatives now in France, to certain charities, to my present servants, and the residue—comprising one-third of my estate, together with any portions that might revert by the death of other beneficiaries—to a certain *religieuse* whose charitable spirit has come to my attention—to Sister Bénédicte, of the Convent of Our Lady of Good Counsel, for such benevolences as she may wish.

During the course of house cleaning—for which my servants possess a regrettable *penchant*, and which coincided with a time when I had certain papers from my vault for reexamination—the will evidently was blown from my table, mixed with papers which had been torn up ready for disposition. These were later conveyed to the refuse barrels, which is the only interpretation I can put upon my loss.

As it may chance that these details, by way of reminder, will enable you to put your finger on a duplicate, may I ask that you will send same, and in any event will communicate with me in due course?

Please accept my salutations, and believe me to be,

Sincerely yours,

AIME CLÉMENT.

I handed the letter back to Silcox. He stared at some lights flashing at us from a way station as our train tore through the night toward the Canadian border.

"I always get the Montreal papers," said Silcox, "and it happens that I ran across a story of the Clément mystery at the time when it took place. Beyond a sense of familiarity, I passed it by. Now, with this letter to hand, I have hunted through a pile of old papers and found it. I wrote to M. Valier, the *maire*, who was mentioned in the dispatch. He sent me a most courteous reply, vividly recounting the circumstances, and begging me, if I could throw any light on the affair, to come at once. To-morrow morning we do the Montreal end, and in the afternoon we proceed to Ste. Félice."

I looked my question. He tapped his pipe against the heel of his boot, to evict the last ashes, and grinned.

"My dear Watson," he chuckled, "I have not read my Doyle for nothing. Well, let's turn in. By the way we have had the smoke room to ourselves, I judge that the whole car has been snoring this past hour. As for our morning in Montreal? The Convent of Our Lady of Good Counsel is in the city, and I have a fancy to visit it."

### III

THE Convent of Our Lady of Good Counsel is tucked away in a fast changing corner of Montreal. It is a place of gray

walls and trees, in whose shade generations of hooded women have walked the flagged ways, and still walk, two by two, chatting in low tones, or singly, at times, in spiritual contemplation.

On that Saturday morning when we entered, let in by a crippled porter, we were the only intruders, save for a group of quarreling sparrows.

Over the main doorway, through which we presently entered, a scene in bas relief portrayed the Mother of Jesus, attended by the apostle John, at the foot of the cross, weeping.

We were ushered into the presence of the mother superior. Her keen gaze selected Silcox.

"You are the gentleman who telephoned? You wish to see me concerning one of our sisters—Sister Bénédicte?"

Silcox bowed.

"In a will drawn by myself some years ago," he said, "a client of mine—M. Clément, of Ste. Félice, left a considerable residue of his estate to Sister Bénédicte, for use in such benevolences as she might dictate."

The nun inclined her head with an odd little smile.

"The vagaries of the rich are providentially turned, at times, into the benefits of the poor. He would doubtless wish prayers to be recited for his soul's welfare."

My companion smiled.

"If you will be so good as to reveal the present whereabouts of M. Clément's soul," he said, "you will confer a favor—whether it is in the body or out of the body. Both seem to have been mysteriously spirited away."

Briefly he sketched the story.

"It was with the thought that we might be mutually helpful in the matter that I came," he concluded. "If you can throw any light on it, we shall be most deeply grateful."

The woman made a helpless gesture.

"I fear I cannot tell you much, *messieurs*," she said; "unless it be any help to know that one wet, wild night, years ago, there came to us from out of the storm a girl seeking sanctuary—from life. To me she related her sad story, and we turned the page to a new chapter of consecration, which all of us have read in the life of Sister Bénédicte."

"And the old chapter?" Silcox ventured.

The nun shook her head gravely.

"Before Our Lady we sealed it in our

hearts forever. It cannot be opened, save by the breaking of a solemn vow."

"At least you can tell us the date?" urged my companion.

The mother superior consulted a record.

"*Mademoiselle*—" she began, and caught herself. "Sister Bénéfice entered our doors first on the 9th day of August, 1902. I fear that is all I can say." She rose, then added, in a quick flash of spirit: "This client of yours, *monsieur*, sought to intrude even upon her sanctuary here!"

She would say no more. The old porter let us out. From the steps one could overlook the broad inclosure where several sisters were walking arm in arm.

"Can you tell me if Sister Bénéfice is there?" Silcox asked the old man.

The porter hesitated. Silcox jingled the change in his pocket. The man said gruffly:

"Just below, by the tree, *m'sieu*."

At that moment the woman glanced up, as if conscious of our regard and not a little frightened by it.

We took our departure. I had expected depression on the part of Silcox, but at luncheon, prior to our departure by the afternoon train for Ste. Félice, he was quite gay. I mentioned the morning's effort as ending in a *cul de sac*.

He looked up from his notebook.

"*Cul de sac* nothing!" he chuckled. "Do you know what day the 9th of August was?"

"The day," I said, "when Sister Bénéfice committed her destinies to Our Lady of Good Counsel, in 1902."

"It is also," he retorted, snapping the elastic on his notebook, "the date in this present year of grace on which the house of Clément forgot to awake!"

#### IV

TWILIGHT mantled Ste. Félice in soft robes of dusk, gold-striped and rose-edged, as we drove from the station to the house of *monsieur le maire*, who received us with a nervous cordiality. Contrary to one's expectation, he was a little man of shy, retiring nature, who, with his wife, lived in a childless house in an obscure street. One had cause to speculate why he should be elevated to the dignity of his position, until one came to know him. Then one's own experience confirmed the declaration of the townsfolk:

"M. Valier has no children of his own, but the whole town is his family."

"I have told no one of your coming," he informed us, his hands drumming an agitated tattoo on his table. "It is an uncomfortable business for us all, this unhappy affair. We do not desire notoriety; yet when you wrote that you might be able to throw light on the mystery, I could not, you understand, pass the matter by. 'Let sleeping dogs lie,' I said. 'Besides, what right have these men to intrude on us?' Then, gentlemen, as *maire*, I heard something in me say: 'Come they must.' Had I not sworn that no stone should be left unturned?"

The tattoo on the table increased.

"You are determined, M. Silcox, to stay in the house itself? Let me dissuade you. It is damp from being long shuttered. Well, you shall first have supper, to give you fortitude, eh? Then I will admit you, as self-appointed custodian of the key."

After a humble but excellent meal we rose to go. The doorbell rang. *Madame* went to the door, returning to say to her husband:

"It was Marie. She has been visiting the Camberts for supper. She said that doubtless Uncle Jean would wish to see her home."

*Monsieur's* eyes brightened. *Madame* shrugged her shoulders and smiled at us.

"It is well, is it not, *messieurs*," she added, "to have a niece to keep one young?"

She laughed and started to collect the dishes.

In the hallway, M. Valier slipped from us into the little parlor where Marie had shyly taken refuge. *Monsieur* rejoined us with a touch of color in his pale cheeks.

We walked the moonlit way to the house of M. Clément. Already the place had an untenanted look. Weeds had taken possession of the lawn. Fallen leaves, red and bronze and yellow, covered the rank growth on the gravel path.

"You will have to be content with oil lamps, of which there are several," said the *maire*. "Some mischievous person has cut the wires long since."

By this aid and guidance we examined the house from top to bottom, while the *maire* recounted the story again. In the bedroom of M. Clément, Silcox seated himself on the side of the bed and waved us to chairs.

"I will ask a few questions, *monsieur*, if you do not mind," he said. "First of all, the authorities—"

"Have grown weary of what is a mere disappearance, it seems, and turned to more definite matters. A full investigation has revealed nothing of import. I gave them, of course, every aid in my power—as *maire*, you understand."

"You have been in the town how long?"

"I was born here."

A question trembled on my companion's lips, but I saw, for I was watching him keenly, that he checked it. He pulled hard at his pipe. Then he said slowly:

"The newspaper reports stressed the rumors of the place being haunted. Just the usual village rumors, of course, which attack any house that is vacant and possessed of a sinister history?"

The *maire* looked uncomfortable.

"So I have said, *monsieur*. To allay these rumors I slept here one night, together with Lafitte, the chemist, and a friend of his who had come in for mass that Sunday. Upon the doze into which we fell while watching there came strange moanings. We hurried down, and M. Lafitte, who is heavily built, slipped and fell. Whether the spirits were frightened or not, one cannot say. We could find nothing, and all doors and windows were locked. Twice since we have tried it, without result; yet the rumors persist. Notary Guidon, who is not careful in the measure of his liquor, coming home late one night, claims to have heard odd sounds from the empty house, from which he fled, befuddled, to the shelter of his own blankets. But there you are—such rumors will not down."

Silcox stretched out his hand and felt the bedding.

"The linen and blankets are a trifle damp," he said dubiously; "but they will serve, with a raincoat stretched over them. I fear rheumatism more than spirits. Must you go, *monsieur*? We will see you out, and then examine the locks again."

"I am sorry not to join you, *messieurs*, but my niece awaits me."

He bowed himself out.

"Did you see the girl?" Silcox said presently, yawning.

"No—why?"

He yawned again.

"Dashed pretty," he said.

We examined every window and door carefully, then went upstairs in silence. It was my first experience of a haunted house, and I registered a mental protest at Silcox's choice of a room for me at the farther end

of the upstairs hall. He would take the front of the house, he said, and I the back, so as to cover the whole field. There was something more ominous about the narrow kitchen quarters than in the broader openness of the front, but I was too proud to object.

For a while I left the light burning, thinking the thing over, until I started from a doze with a cry. Silcox stood in the doorway, grinning at me.

"Shut off the light, you idiot!" he said in a low voice.

I blew out the lamp, and heard his footfalls go creaking into nothingness down the corridor.

## V

STE. FÉLICE air, with its coolness, must have virtue, for the next thing I remember is my awakening in a strange room, flooded with morning sunshine. Recalling where I was, I jumped out of bed and padded along the floor to Silcox's room, which was once M. Clément's. The bed there was empty.

I returned, and, thrusting my head out of my casement to enjoy the freshness of the morning, beheld my companion already dressed and sitting on a weather-worn rustic seat, engaged in the idle task of chucking pebbles at some refuse cans that stood or lay in disorder outside the kitchen door.

"Lazybones!" he challenged, at sight of me. "It's after nine o'clock, and your humble has been up pretty well since day-break. No—no spooks! Just a simple noise out of doors, and my curiosity roused, and I with it. I've been smoking, and thinking, and chatting with the very intelligent maidservant who attends to Notary Guidon's kitchen. We've had a delightful chat on the hygienic institutions of small town life. Hurry up, like a good fellow! I'm famished. After we forage for some breakfast, I have a fancy to take a little walk into the country."

The church bell was ringing for the ten o'clock mass when we left the local hotel, having finished our breakfast, and quickly put the town behind us.

"Right by the old mill, so the girl said," Silcox murmured, making a sharp turn into a sheltered lane. "And then—ah, here we are!"

Through a dilapidated gateway we were suddenly ushered into a nondescript farmyard of small size. Clacking fowls scat-



tered before our approach. Pigeons fluttered to new roosting places. A dog eyed us lazily. Immediately opposite us, a horse's head protruded through an open stable window, and two big, intelligent eyes seemed to regard us without favor.

"Hello, old fellow!" said Silcox, moving forward and reaching out an arm.

"Ah, don't do that!"

The shrill warning came none too soon. Silcox sprang back from the wicked teeth and curling lips, and at the same time clouted the animal angrily. He turned to thank the young girl who had opportunely appeared on the steps, but stopped short at sight of an elderly man coming from the doorway—a man whose stoop deceived one as to his height, and in whom, to judge by the eyes, a rebellious spirit of youth seemed strangely housed.

"*Par Dieu!*" he swore, shaking his fist. "You dare to touch my Louis Quatorze?"

The beast whinnied at sight of him, and he hurried forward, fondling it.

"Your pardon, *messieurs*," he said, unexpectedly turning to us, "but to strike my horse is to strike me. No one else can understand an old man's sorrows—no one else, hey, Louis Quatorze?" He added snarply: "What is it you wish, *messieurs*?"

"M. Daudet, I am the lawyer of the late lamented M. Clément," said Silcox frankly, to my surprise. "You will understand that the carrying out of the provisions of his will is dependent upon proof of his death. I thought in this matter to secure your help. Just a question or two."

"Why should you question me?"

"Has no one asked you questions regarding the case?"

"No, *m'sieu'*. Why should they?"

"Until recently you had charge of collecting and disposing of the town's garbage and refuse?"

"But yes, *m'sieu'*."

"Once a week, I understand. On what day?"

"Every Monday."

"At daybreak?"

"Yes."

"You gave it up?"

"A month or two ago, *m'sieu'*. I am rheumatic: I could not do it longer."

"And your successor carries on just as you did?"

"Yes, *m'sieu'*—except that he collects at daybreak on Sunday, having work elsewhere on other days. He is a Jew."

"But at the time of M. Clément's singular disappearance you were still employed. Did you notice anything strange that day as you took the refuse from the house of Clément?"

"How should I notice anything? I carried on my work as usual. In the morning I heard the news." He shivered a little, and fondled the horse. "It is a bad place, *m'sieu'*, the house of Clément. It is not a good place to go near—or to talk about!"

"You do not believe in evil spirits, surely?"

Daudet looked up, and a queer blaze lit his eyes.

"I know them to exist, *m'sieu'*," he said, and disappeared, shaking his head, into the stable.

Silcox shot me a quick, half quizzical glance, and moved toward the gate.

"We'll have to stick it out at the Clément place until something happens interesting enough to disturb our slumbers, old top," he laughed, and lit a cigarette. "Where there's smoke there's fire, and this place has a reputation!"

The girl stood at the gate, and opened it for us. As we passed, she put an urgent hand on Silcox's arm.

"I heard what you said just now. I understand English a little. You intend, is it so, to stay there again to-night?"

He smiled down at her.

"Please, please!" she pleaded earnestly. "Don't go there. Go to the hotel to-night. It's not a good place, the Clément house!"

Silcox regarded her silently for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders, and we moved off. The girl seemed to shrink back from us, and we left her so, staring after us until the yellowing autumn lane swallowed us up.

The smile quickly died from Silcox's face, and we walked in silence. I was thinking of a little black and white figure against a background of gray walls and trees tucked away in an ancient corner of a prosperous modern city. She, too, had regarded us with just such frightened eyes.

I saw that my companion was stirred by some similar thought. Rather proud of my powers of observation, I asked him if the girl was on his mind. He regarded me quizzically.

"Ah!" he said dryly. "The old saying holds true, doesn't it? There's always a woman in the case! Ah, *monsieur le maire!*"

After that we walked in silence, for my questionings brought only a tight-lipped shake of the head.

## VI

THE brilliant sunshine of the early morning was too good to last. By noon it had been dissipated. Clouds hung low on the horizon, and as the day waned they advanced upon us in gray battalions.

Silcox and I spent a reflective afternoon up the local stream. As we returned homeward, rain began to fall, at first with a puff of wind, which quickly died, then steadily, drenchingly, from a low, leaden sky devoid of cloud markings. Leaves, in untimely downfall, fluttered past us, to lie sodden on the ground. The village, as we came upon it over a slight rise, was a gray desolation.

It was Silcox's fancy that we should partake of our evening meal in the Clément house, and Mme. Valier was as good as her husband's word in setting a table and provisioning it against our coming. It was not altogether a cheerful meal, for my companion was unusually quiet.

The rain continued. The dull, steady roar of the downpour seemed to shut us off from all other human kind.

We smoked and chatted long after the meal.

"Enough to dampen any one's spirits," laughed Silcox, tapping the ashes from his pipe. "Still, suppose we take the young lady seriously enough to be a bit wakeful? I'll take the first turn, and then, when I'm sleepy, I'll call you."

He followed me to my room at the back of the house, and sat chatting while I prepared for my turn of sleep. He remained even after the light was out, and my last impression was of his face just touched into visible contour by the glow of a cigarette he had lit.

When I awoke, it was with a sudden start, and my nerves were trembling, yet without reason that I could assign. I listened, straining to hear, as if the utter darkness stood between me and the thing that had awakened me.

The rain had ceased, and only the drip from the eaves broke the silence; yet unmistakably I had been wakened. By what?

I eased myself cautiously out of bed, and groped my way to the door and into the hallway, until I felt my hand on the rail of the narrow staircase. A night breeze sprang up on the heels of the storm, and set the

half naked branches of a tree tapping at my window. A fresh little shower followed for only a moment or two—a clearing shower, which covered my laughter at my case of nerves, and then ceased as abruptly as it had begun.

I took a step backward, intent on returning to bed again. Then I stopped with that same tingling sensation upon me.

From somewhere, as I fancied, in the bowels of the old Clément house there came a low mumbling, almost a groaning, almost a wailing—at times indistinct and dying away, at times rising to a chant. For a matter of seconds only it continued, and then ended in an odd snarling sound.

I located it now as reaching me from the well of the stairs immediately below me. Any impulse I had to secure the aid of Silcox was thwarted by a nightmare fascination. I found myself descending into the black well below, scarce knowing why or whither I went. Utter silence reigned now—an unbearable silence.

Some urge still drove me forward on tip-toe. A board creaked under my weight, and I stood, poised, irresolute, waiting to hear I knew not what. Oddly, in response, there was borne to me a sound less distinct than before—the sound of a sobbing murmur, as of mumbled words rising, falling—rising, falling—a chant at once monotonous and awe inspiring.

Flashing thoughts of the native superstitions came to me, and for the moment these phantoms of untutored minds were made mine. I fancied some disembodied spirit revisiting earth from a hell of its own earning. So, as Dives besought his Father Abraham, might such a spirit turn to what succor it knew?

My eyes now discovered light in the midst of gloom. Between the passage in which I found myself and the kitchen there was a little pantry, lighted by a window through which the rays of the notarial lamp shone directly. Like a mild golden gleam in a gloom-filled chapel, they poured upon a cloaked and hooded figure. The hands of this figure were raised in a perfect agony of supplication; but I knew at once that the lips, though they seemed to move, were not responsible for the sound which still came like a dull, dead echo of this hooded sister's agony.

For the face, dimly revealed to me, and made soft and beautiful in the faint golden light, was the face of Sister Bénédicte!

Coincident with the paralysis of amazement that came upon me, I saw her grow suddenly tense in a new way, as if her mind had been distracted from more spiritual things. I caught, as she must have, the clink of glass against glass. I heard a sigh, full of an everlasting weariness, and, as if upon it, she disappeared, and where she had been there remained now but that faint beam of golden light.

To my fevered imagination the apparition had vanished in some supernatural way, but as I stepped forward into the pantry I caught the faintest gleam beneath me, and, stooping, found a little pool of water, such as might form under a kneeling figure, rain-soaked.

I became conscious then that in place of the monotonous chant there was a sibilant sound of protest. Then came words, quick and distinct:

"No, no! Ah, God—no!"

There followed a piercing cry of anguish and the crash of glass.

For the instant that my feet remained irresolute upon the threshold of the little pantry, there was a ghastly silence. Then there came—not from the house, but from without—a shrill response, a trumpeting challenge, a snarling echo, devoid of any human semblance, and a man's shout, compounded of fear and anger.

I heard the sounds of a chair falling, of a door banging, as I dashed into the kitchen, which shared some gleams from the notarial lamp. A gust of chill air met me from the already open doorway, and I dimly detected two figures fleeing into the night.

Intent on following them, a slippery place on the floor tripped me, sending me lurching forward against the table, to fall in confusion on the floor. As I staggered to my feet, in an attempt still to follow, a figure blocked the doorway. It was Silcox.

"Never mind them," he gasped. "Here, take my torch and get a lamp lit!"

I obeyed.

He stood there, swaying a little, but with that inevitable grin upon his lips.

"You'll have to do a little tourniquet for me, old man. I'm afraid my fin's in rather bad shape!"

He held out his left arm, and I saw that his hand was crushed and bleeding. Repressed agony brought sweat to his forehead. I gave him such aid as I could. Suddenly he said:

"What's the matter with your arm?"

I looked at the arm of my shirt, for I had lain down partly dressed. Its whiteness was stained as red as the blood that saturated his own bandages. I glanced at the floor. A ruddy pool gleamed in a ghastly way.

"It's blood!" I cried.

His brow suddenly cleared, and he laughed aloud.

"Look at your blood!" he said, stooping and picking up a bottle. "Some one has been cutting the arteries of M. Clément's wine cellar. Can you guess who?"

"If I hadn't been a slow fool I'd have had my hands on him, instead of guessing!" I said angrily.

"Not much guesswork," he said, biting his lips in his pain. "After I get this fixed by the doctor, and have a bit of rest, I'll take you to him. I heard the sound of wheels on gravel just now, and looked out. There was a rig coming up the driveway to the back door, with no one in it. I slipped quietly out to investigate, and got this. There's only one animal in these parts that would do that, I'll wager!"

He ruefully indicated his injured arm.

"Daudet's horse!" I cried.

"Daudet's horse," he agreed.

## VII

NEVER shall I forget that Monday at Ste. Félice. The rain had cleared, and October blue and white formed our canopy as we stepped from the house that would not waken, and walked through the streets, still comparatively deserted, to the house of M. Valier. My companion was strangely troubled and thoughtful.

The little man himself opened to us.

"*Bonjour*," he said. "Come in! I did not expect you so early. What a day we have given you, to be sure! Ah, *monsieur*, your hand—something has happened?"

He showed us into the little parlor with a gracious gesture, but I saw that his own hand was shaking.

"Yes, *monsieur*," said Silcox, gravely enough. "I had an argument with a horse."

"A horse?" repeated M. Valier.

"The horse that drew the evil spirits, *monsieur*," replied Silcox grimly. "To-day I propose to lay my hands upon the most wicked beast in Ste. Félice, and so upon the key to solve the mystery." He paused, and regarded M. Valier closely.



"Am I to have the help of *monsieur le maire*?"

M. Valier stared into the fire on the hearth.

"Am I not entitled to a little more explanation, M. Silcox? I am at your service, but—"

"If you are ready to accompany me, we can talk as we go," replied Silcox.

"But yes, of course!" cried the little man. "I will fetch my hat and coat at once—at once!"

Silcox rose and strode up and down the room, after a fashion he had when impatient or eager. M. Valier was gone for some time. My companion fell to examining the pictures on the walls, the views from the windows, with which the room was well provided, front, side, and back. Having done this, Silcox resumed his pacing.

At length M. Valier appeared in the doorway, appareled for the street, full of apology for his delay.

"If you are ready—" he said.

Silcox put a hand on his shoulder.

"Had we not better go by the back door, *monsieur le maire*?" he asked suavely. "It was a mistake, was it not, to overlook the removal of the horse from the back fence, where he was tied up until just now?"

M. Valier's face went ashen, and he seemed to shrink into his warm raccoon coat until it grew too big for him. A chair was near him. He sank into it, covered his face with his hands, and groaned.

At last he lifted his head. Tears stood in his eyes.

"*Monsieur*," he said, "it has always been reported of Jean Valier that he was a man of honor and integrity. I ask only that you will believe of me that until this morning I have done my duty. To-day I have faltered, under pressure that I pray you may never have to endure. To-morrow I will resign from public life!"

"M. Valier, I am here quite unofficially," Silcox replied quietly. "I have no authority and no warrant. Curiosity and a hobby for disentangling things have brought me here. I have, among other things, a fancy for character reading. If you wish us to withdraw, my friend and I will do so. I am certain that justice may be safely left in your hands."

M. Valier lifted his gray head.

"As *maire*, *monsieur*, I swore to leave no stone unturned to clear up this affair. To-morrow I shall be a private citizen again.

To-day I am *maire*. I shall not fail again in my duty. I must think what it is best to do."

*Madame* appeared presently, breaking our silence. She had been weeping, and was breathing heavily now.

"Jean!" she called.

He excused himself and went. When he returned, there was peace in his face.

"*Messieurs*," he said, "God is good. He has made the path of duty easier. It is my brother's wish that you should hear his confession also—as well as the *curé*, for whom we have just sent."

He led us upstairs when the priest arrived. Daudet lay upon a bed, beside which, in the shadow, sat a girl who startled me as I saw her profile, so like was she to Sister *Bénéfice*. When she looked up, I saw that she was the girl who had stood yesterday in Daudet's farmyard, following our departure with frightened eyes.

## VIII

SILCOX'S notebook, which he asked permission to use stenographically, lies before me as I write. By its means I refresh my recollection of the strange story we heard.

"In my early days, *messieurs*," said M. Daudet, "I was a pioneering spirit; and when it came that I returned home and married, my wife, for the love she had for me, made no complaint at that. We went to the rough beginnings of a settlement, where in due time my wife bore me a child, but without medical aid, for the roads were not good and aid was many miles away. My wife died, *messieurs*. I took her body home, that it might lie in her own parish churchyard. With the child I fled presently from the bitterness and the criticism of relatives. I came here, where lived Jean Valier, my half brother, who had always understood me better than my own brother. Mme. Valier aided with the baby. In time I bought this bit of farm, and was content to make a bare living and watch my child growing into beautiful womanhood."

He paused, sighed, and went on:

"Was it my fault that I tried to keep her for myself alone? Ah, well, she saw men, mostly without my knowing, for she feared to hurt me; and then there came a time when her tongue fell silent, her cheeks became pale, her ways nervous. A week later she was gone. I searched, but kept my own counsel, to save her reputation. A note came presently from the city.

"'I have loved too greatly and trusted too much,' it said. 'Do not grieve for me. I am unworthy of your pity.'

"Months later the woman who now kept house for me came running in early one morning.

"'*M'sieu*,' she cried, 'come quickly and see what is on the doorstep!'

"And there, in a basket, lay a baby a few weeks old. Pinned to its tiny clothes, stitched with such care—she was deft with her needle, my daughter—was a note.

"'Bring up the child,' it said, 'and let it replace the one lost to you and unworthy. I go to-day to find such peace as I may in the things of God.'

Old Daudet's voice broke.

"I searched long. I found her in a city convent. She bade me, as I still professed love for her, to keep silence—as I had always done, letting the village think that she was dead and the child an orphan. Her lover's name she would not divulge. My faith, I think she loved him still, *messieurs*! I came back. I lost interest in life. My farm suffered, and I was glad, in my difficulties, to get the work of carting the town's refuse to the dump."

He paused again, and pulled the blanket about him.

"One day in June I went as usual, early on Monday morning, to make my rounds, while people slept. I found much rubbish thrown out of the Clément house. Among it was one paper, not torn, which I saw to be the will of M. Clément. I put it into my pocket, to return to him. Curiosity made me glance at it when I got home. 'To Sister Bénédicte,' I read, and I needed to read no more. How should he know her, of whom none in the town knew? Why leave her money? My heart stopped beating. I knew! I knew at last! I read it again. He had thought that only at his death would the thing be known, and his conscience doubtless bade him do thus much at least; but now the paper trembled in the hand of the father of Sister Bénédicte!

"The rest can be told quickly. I nursed the thing, and three weeks went by before the devil made his next move. Knowing the man Franck well, I sought quietly to learn all about M. Clément's way of life. One day Franck informed me, with a chuckle, that *monsieur* must shift for himself over the week-end, while he and his wife attended the marriage of his sister. Then the devil made him tell me:

"'*M'sieu*' is so particular! Such directions as I had to give him—down to the length of time he must leave his usual bedtime punch in the ice box to cool!'

"I went home. I took from their hiding place some tablets that M. Lafitte had given me long before, to put away an injured dog. Loathing seized me, but the devil must have directed my eyes to a calendar near by, for I suddenly laughed aloud. By what strange coincidence must the ninth day of August fall on this coming Sunday? I only know that it was so—fascinatingly so—and that Sunday night found me outside the Clément house. I knew not how I was to get in, but it seemed that nothing was left unready for my deed. The night was hot, and the kitchen window was only screened. I climbed in. Knowing the ground, the rest was easy; though I found myself staring stupidly at the muddy marks I left, and trying to brush them away, lest presently he should notice them.

"I climbed out, and joined M. Bourgie in our usual chat and pipe on Sunday nights. When our party broke up, I remember that in the Clément house, opposite, there were lights. M. Bourgie laughingly referred to *monsieur's* nightcap as he appeared at an upper window. I started home—and something brought me back. I boldly went to M. Clément's door—though no one saw me, it seems. When he came, I pushed past him into the house, lest he should close the door against me. I prayed to God he might not yet have taken the drink.

"'I have come,' I said crazily, 'to join you in your glass of punch, *m'sieu*!'

"I swear, *messieurs*, I meant to stop him. He stiffened.

"'You have come too late,' he said, 'for I have had mine; and in any case, may I ask why you should so strangely honor me?'

"His sneer matched his words.

"'Is it not fitting,' I said bitterly, 'that the father of Sister Bénédicte and grandfather of your child should visit you?'

"A queer light leaped to his eyes, but it spoke fear and guilt. Standing there, I told him the thing that I had done, and bade him, in the few moments left him, to make his peace with God. I hardly knew how it happened, *messieurs*, but suddenly he was at my throat and I at his. Old man though I am, I knew it was my night. Then, as we struggled, suddenly he fell limp, and I knew that the poison had

worked. I left his body where it fell, and fled away.

"At daybreak, making my usual rounds with my cart, I came last of all to the Clément house. The body still lay upon the floor, as I had fled from it. I put it on the top of my load, and spread the canvas cover over all. His keys had fallen from his pocket, and I slipped them unthinkingly into my own. I remember going upstairs and fetching down the telltale glass, with its dregs of poisoned punch."

M. Daudet's voice stopped on a quavering note. He covered his face with his leathery hands.

"I—I drove to the slough, *messieurs*—to the slough where our town refuse is dumped. I backed in my load, and, scarce daring to look, dumped it. Later I gained courage. Cutting a branch, I reached out and hauled up the canvas cover, which, being flat and light, remained on the surface. I told myself that the betrayer of my daughter had disappeared forever."

Daudet paused, and added:

"It was not so, *messieurs*, that it was the end of him. He lives in here!"

He rapped his forehead sharply. His eyes pleaded dumbly for understanding.

"What was it sent me to the house on my rounds the next week, with his keys in my pocket? I relived the horror of it all. In my acute distress I sought his cellar, for I knew from Franck where his wines and spirits were kept. I poured myself a glass—another—another. I came home fuddled, but for once free from care. Next week it happened so again. I gave up my work on the plea of illness, but all the next Sunday I burned within—and night found me there again."

Daudet wept. After a time he recovered himself.

"That was the worst night of all. My poor Marie, knowing little but fearing much, followed me. But for her I should have gone and shouted my story drunkenly to the town. When I saw her there beside me, hooded and cloaked, for there was rain that night, I imagined it was a vision of her mother, in the garb of her penitence, come to reproach me and to convict me of my sin. I knelt, half sobered, and vowed by Our Lady that I would do penance; that where I had come to forget in drunken bravado, I would come each week to pray—for my soul, and his. And each Sunday night, so late that none were awake, I went.

I would leave Louis Quatorze hidden down the road. Last night he must have become untied. Last night Marie would have it that I must break my vow—that there was danger; but I only smiled, and would not listen, *messieurs*. It had come to me that my burden could not be eased; that discovery must inevitably come in time. A new and terrible fascination was upon me. Last night I—"

He stopped suddenly, and sat straight up in bed.

"What time is it now?" he asked.

"Scarcely eleven," said the priest.

"Ten hours!" muttered old Daudet. "I do not understand. The dog in half an hour, the man in an hour, and I—"

I remembered the ruddy pool of wine in which I had slipped.

"Perhaps," said Daudet wearily, "I have lingered so long that the burden of silence might be lifted." His voice quavered. "A suicide, father—you have no cure for his soul, have you?"

The room was filled with grave silence.

"How many tablets did you take?" Silcox asked.

"Two, *m'sieu'*—all I had."

"And Clément—three, you said?"

"Three!" said Daudet, and covered his face with his hands.

There followed silence again. At a gesture from the priest we went out and left him with the man.

## IX

THE *curé* came out after a while.

"Daudet is worse," he said. "He is shaking now as if with ague. Marie tells me that she tried to get the doctor, against her grandfather's wishes, but he is away. I fear the old man is slipping fast."

Silcox had been sitting by the fire, smoking away, and having no conversational traffic with any of us. He rather startled us now by a sudden remark.

"Nerves are bad things!" he said, looking up. "The fields of the neurologist and of the criminologist overlap a deal."

Then he relapsed into his exclusive silence. My night's adventures had not been conducive to rest, and, being left to ourselves, I fell sound asleep.

When I awoke, my companion was standing over me, dressed for the street. I asked him where he was going.

"Going?" he laughed. "Coming, my dear man! I've been chatting with the aid



of the telephone in M. Lafitte's store, and without it. We're leaving by the noon train, so you'll need to get a move on. There's nothing further to detain us here. Between the *curé* and the *maire* the matter is in better and more authoritative hands than ours."

When our train rolled into the Montreal terminus, Silcox handed the bags to a red cap.

"Take this gentleman into the hotel," he said. "A double room will do," he told me, grinning. "I had no bed at all last night to speak of. I want room to-night. And you get one—*en suite*, if you can. See you later!"

I obeyed with my usual docility. He was back in time for dinner, and though he spoke little I saw by his manner that he was tremendously elated.

"We'll have to rush it," he said. "Let's try the cafeteria." We found a corner to ourselves. "You'll have to play a lone hand to-night," he explained briefly. "I'm leaving here at eight."

His instructions to me were clear and simple, but they left me very much in the dark. I nodded agreement as he went.

At half past eight I left the hotel. A walk through deserted down town streets brought me to where the Convent of Our Lady of Good Counsel bulked gray against the steel blue of the sky. A taxi rank was immediately opposite, with few cabs in it. I chose the leading one, and, getting in, bade the man be ready to obey orders. My credentials and a five-dollar bill overcame his hesitation.

I had to wait perhaps ten minutes, watching the deserted gateway of the convent and the light gleaming in the old porter's lodge. Presently a taxi drew up in front; a woman emerged from the lodge, hurried out through the gateway, and got into the waiting car, which at once drove off.

From out of the shadows of the gray wall, farther up, another car emerged, to disappear around the corner after the first. Immediately I ordered my man to follow. We swung away and picked up the trail.

There was no haste in the chase, and I ordered my man to use discretion, that we might not be suspected. Through brightly lighted thoroughfares we drove for a time, then followed quieter streets, where the absence of traffic both increased the speed and made it necessary for us to drop back farther.

Quickly now the larger car that had come from the shadows shot past the first car, taking the lead itself.

We left behind the crowded tenements and flats of the north end. Mount Royal and its few circling lights fell away on our left. Detached houses gave place to open spaces, with occasional long rows of flats and mediocre houses, forerunners of congestion yet to come with the years. Abruptly the leading car turned to the right, and I was glad of the caution of my driver in pulling up at the corner, for a few houses along the side street both cars stopped. From the leading car a man stepped quickly; from the second came the woman whom I had seen leaving the convent.

I confess that my heart beat quickly with the crisis upon me. I had slipped from my own car, and had moved along the street. A few children were playing about, and I met a passer-by or two, so that my approach was casual. The cars, like my own, had been dismissed.

"They will enter together," Silcox had told me. "You must follow at once, ready for any eventuality. The door will be off the latch. Go right in, and use your common sense."

So close was I behind the man and the woman that I was almost on their heels. They were too much wrapped up in their own concerns to notice me. I took refuge behind a curtain, my heart thumping amazingly, and my mind whirling with questions that only Silcox could answer, especially the paramount question of his own present location.

It was very dark, because only a small bulb lit the hall.

"Just one minute, Adèle, until I find the other switch," said the man.

Light flooded the room. The girl was heavily veiled, but she lifted her veil now.

The man started backward. Instead of the pale, timid face of Sister Bénéfice, we looked upon a dashing young woman, powdered and rouged. She rose, and her height seemed increased over that of the shrinking figure that had hurried to and from the taxi.

"Well, *monsieur*?" she challenged in French.

"Who—who are you?" he stammered.

"Not Sister Bénéfice, certainly," said the girl quickly; "but some one much interested in her and in you."

She smiled coquettishly at him—a smile

so like a well known grin that I was startled into a loud chuckle. From out of the dim days of war entertainments, when men were dependent on themselves for female parts, I remembered the chum of mine who had fooled even the colonel himself into a rage at a woman being found in the men's barracks!

The man started angrily.

"What trick is this?" he demanded.

"A little bit of fun mixed with a great deal of seriousness, *monsieur*," said Silcox, in his natural voice. "If I remove this beastly wig, you may possibly recognize in me a young man who once had the pleasure of drawing your will for you, and to whom, not long ago, you wrote for a copy!"

### X

At eleven o'clock that night M. Clément slept, heavily enough, in the room that we had taken *en suite*. Before a flickering fire in our own apartment, Silcox sat with me. We had forgotten the need of sleep.

"Besides," said Silcox, "we must take turns in keeping an eye on the johnny in there, although I think he's put for the night."

"Tell me," I said, "how in the world you pulled this thing off!"

He grinned boyishly.

"I was waiting for that," he chuckled. "It conforms to all the standards of my favorite fiction. Well, I'll not claim any laurels for scientific deduction. A bit of luck, something of imagination, and a few grains of common sense—that's my recipe. To begin with, I had a knowledge of the will—a knowledge that I alone possessed. I knew it to be lost—thrown out, apparently, with household rubbish. Sister Bénédicte, naturally, was the first ray of light—any one would have followed that up. Then our first night in the haunted house. It was a wakeful night, but not a sound or stir save what? Do you recall? The removal of garbage, very early in the morning, from the cans at the notary's back door. Keyed up as I was, the noise startled me. Then, when I found out what it was, I was mad and amused by turns. I thought again, by natural association, how the will went out in the rubbish, and a queer little thrill ran through me. The thing, vague at first, grew on me. When I went out to look about in the morning, I saw the maid next door putting out some stuff. I found out from her about the change from Daudet to

the Jew. After that it was clear that I should see Daudet.

"There was the girl in the farmyard—the *maire's* niece. There was old Daudet, so queer about things—and the girl's warning—not to mention the horse. Our night's adventure was topped off nicely with my injured fin. There was no doubt, then, that Daudet was our objective—which brings us to his confession. His story was true, as far as he knew; but the pills interested me. Why was the old man not dead? I visited Lafitte, and he assured me the pills would not be potent if kept any length of time. I'll wager the old man is still alive, if his nerves have held out."

Here Silcox paused, pulling at his pipe thoughtfully.

"But Clément?"

"Ah! I think it was the *maire* who drove me to it. Poor old fellow, what a terrible thing for him to face—a dishonorable complexity in a life of honorable simplicity! I persuaded him to postpone his resignation for at least a day. I asked myself what had happened to Clément. It struck me that Clément might see in Daudet's deed a chance to escape the past and gild the future. He still loved Sister Bénédicte, whom he had so greatly wronged, for he still bothered her—even to the doors of the sanctuary, as the superior let slip. Very good! He would realize Daudet's game. It remained for him to lie still when the old man came, to suffer the discomfort of being lifted atop the load of rubbish and covered with the canvas. How easy then to slip out from under while the driver's back was turned, to watch the dumping, and to know that to Daudet he was dead and sunk beneath the mire!

"Once in the city, by careful management, he could play his cards. Another note to Sister Bénédicte, pleading his love, his desire to bring happiness out of an unhappy past, and a faint, but growing threat of power in holding over her the attempted murder by her father!

"This was my construction of the case. The next thing was to see if it would hold water. I asked myself how I would attempt to work such a scheme. I remembered how the old porter at the convent had responded to a five-dollar bill, and how he had started at the name of Sister Bénédicte. I phoned the mother superior, asked her to make investigations quietly, and told her that I would be in by the first train.

When I went up to-night, I found that I had hit it. The old rascal of a porter had been receiving notes, taking bribes for them, and secreting them. He was afraid to deliver them, and had been playing M. Clément for a sucker with verbal answers of his own devising. Ferreting in his things, the notes were found. They very largely substantiated my theory. M. Clément was so urgent in his demand that his former love should break the vows that made her life a thing of devotional beauty, that he had made provision of a costume into which she could change in the porter's lodge. Then she was to join him and flee in a taxi. Man like, he had, luckily for me, secured clothes much too large for her. He had most of his fortune in government bonds, which he had gathered, so he himself confesses, in the city under another name, expecting that some day, with the canker of an unsatisfied passion for the woman he had wronged always troubling him, he would need to carry his money with him, if he could persuade her to flee with him.

"It was not difficult for me to induce the porter to send a note to *monsieur*, arranging a meeting such as took place to-night. The rest you know. You will forgive my giving you a few bad moments, old chap, but I haven't impersonated since the old days, and the dramatic lure overcame my better judgment.

"Clément? Oh, he'll make no trouble now. His declaration that he really did nothing beyond the law is bluff. He's scared—and he's wise enough to prefer a return to outward respectability rather than a show-down with the powers that be. You'll not find him bothering the inmates of Our Lady of Good Counsel again."

## XI

I HAVE given, in truthful reconstruction, an August picture. Now let me give an October one.

Dawn came again to Ste. Félice—a cold, gray October dawn—so cold that it was temptation beyond the ordinary to remain beneath coverlets; but from the house of *monsieur le maire* smoke arose early, indicating that *madame* was already up and concerned with breakfast. M. Valier, in fact, had desired her not to rise, but rise she would, that he might be attended in his duties with inward comfort and the stimulation of good coffee.

The fire was scarcely drawing in his own

tiny room, where stood the desk at which most of his mayoral work was done—not an onerous task, but one scrupulously attended to. He loved the official-looking dockets, the correspondence taped into neat bundles, the inks and pencils and papers and paraphernalia. In this room, too, he had entertained distinguished visitors. Once Laurier himself had sat in that very chair!

*Monsieur* raised a hand to his eyes, and, flicking away an unbidden tear, pretended to himself and to *madame*, who had entered, that he was but blowing warmth on his hands. *Madame* set down hot coffee and bread of her own baking, golden with crust.

*Monsieur* occupied himself with his duties. He arranged his dockets, his papers, ready that they might be turned over in proper form to his successor, whoever might be appointed. Later there would be more to do in the office at the town hall. That would be easier than here, perhaps, where Laurier once sat.

Marie, passing in the hall, with a tray, slipped in. For his sake she managed a cheerful smile.

"How is—he?" asked *monsieur* bravely.

"Much better," said Marie. "I—I believe, uncle, he is going to get well."

Both hope and fear were in her eyes. *Monsieur le maire*, turning away, saw his face in the mirror hanging near, and knew that he, too, had fear and hope in his eyes.

In the square where the six great houses slept, five, as usual, began to awake. Across the way Marcil, the assistant of M. Cambert, gossiped with the lad who adjusted the awnings for M. Bourgie.

"Look!" cried Marcil, stopping his gossip, his mouth agape.

The lad who fetched and carried for M. Bourgie followed the pointing finger. Smoke was ascending from the chimneys of the House That Would Not Awake!

As they looked, a man appeared in the doorway. He was an ordinary serving man, and he brushed off the steps with a besom as unconcerned as if it was the most ordinary and natural thing in the world.

The two lads called their masters, who also stared.

"Some one has taken the place!" declared M. Cambert, not without awe.

"Undoubtedly," agreed M. Bourgie.

"I shall speak about securing the trade," rejoiced M. Cambert.

He crossed and approached the man at the door, who led him in.



M. Cambert returned to the street presently. He walked as one who has drunk too much wine.

"I have seen M. Clément!" he said, much as a man might say: "I have seen the dead!"

"But no!"

"But yes—and heard him speak, moreover. 'Come,' he said, laughing in my face, 'have you dropped in about your old account? I regret it has run so long, but I did not think to carry the joke so far.'"

"Joke!" repeated M. Bourgie. "A pretty joke to play on the town!"

"Fie!" challenged M. Cambert bravely, rubbing his hands a little, as he always did when trade was promising. "If *monsieur* wishes to have his little joke, who are you, and who am I, to say him nay?"

This saying of M. Cambert's became current at the supper tables of Ste. Félice.

"Should we not tell *monsieur le maire*?" questioned M. Bourgie. "Run, Marcil!"

Marcil's legs were ready in this office. He found M. Valier seated at his desk, in apparent idleness, staring at neat piles of papers laid before him, and at the gaping, empty pigeonholes above. Marcil stam-

mered out his message, and left the room. M. Valier was stunned, unbelieving, and so still hopeless.

The manservant of M. Clément brought a note. By the hand of *madame* it reached the *maire*. It was in the handwriting of Silcox:

Miracles sometimes happen, and it is wise to accept what the gods send. Herewith I am restoring to Ste. Félice its leading citizen, M. Clément. He will treat the matter as a joke, a famous hoax. Let it be so. Ask no questions. As for the rest, remember always that silence is golden, and that sleeping dogs are best let lie. Bid your stepbrother—whose nerves, I trust, have much recovered in these past forty-eight hours—to forget the past, and all his fancies.

My felicitations to *monsieur le maire*, with the hope that he may long discharge the duties of his honorable office.

*Monsieur le maire* still seemed slow of comprehension. I have *madame's* own word for that. Then his head lifted, and two big tears plopped unrebuked upon an official pile of documents. He brushed them aside, and began with trembling hands to replace his precious papers in their pigeonholes, in the room where once the great Laurier had sat.

## TREASURES

LAUGHTER, love, and song, dear,  
Youth and hope renew;  
Though all else be false, dear,  
These I know are true.  
Tears may drown our laughter  
For a while, but then  
It will follow after  
When hope glows again.

Laughter, love, and song, dear,  
Make the world seem sweet;  
Though all else be vain, dear,  
These are all complete.  
Grief may hush our singing  
For a day or more,  
But 'twill soon be ringing  
Sweeter than before.

Laughter, song, and love, dear,  
Render beauty fair,  
Lend the spheres their music,  
Rob the world of care.  
Doubt our love may darken  
For a time, but no—  
Love will not long hearken  
To love's bitter foe!

William Wallace Whitelock

# Lion Stuff

A STORY OF CAGED CREATURES WHO MADE A BOLD DASH  
FOR LIBERTY

By Perley Poore Sheehan

FROM where he sat plugging at his typewriter in the sultry little cabin on the hill, Jedway could hear the lions roaring their torment in the menagerie a quarter of a mile farther back. The sound filled him with what he himself would have called a "vague unrest." He wished, almost subconsciously, that he could roar like that.

He was working upon his fourth version of "Satan's Wife," and he had a feeling that the script would never be finished. He had had the same feeling when he was writing the first continuity, and the second, and the third. In vain he repeated the old formula that he should worry if the Cosmos Film Corporation should pay twenty thousand dollars for the film rights of a lot of piffle that happened to be a best-seller, and then pay him a salary to lick it into shape; but Jedway did worry. He was worrying now. That's what made him want to roar.

He was a small man with what would ordinarily be called a quiet manner. By comparison with the rest of him, his head was too large, and yet his glasses appeared to be too large for his head. He wore a high starched collar, and his clothes were too tight. This was because Mrs. Jedway was sure he would never get along in the world unless he kept himself looking like a gentleman.

Jedway wanted to get along. There was no harder worker around the big studio. It was already long past knocking-off time for the two thousand other employees. The back ranch—but recently the scene of a vast and complex activity—had gone silent. The Chinese village in the gulch just below the cabin had been stricken as by a plague. The last of the gringos and greasers at the Mexican *hacienda* across

the street had piled fraternally into a company bus half an hour ago, the beautiful heroine forgotten, and their only interest a seven-fifty pay check for a hard day's work.

It was feeding time for the lions—which was probably the reason why they roared; but Jedway considered this explanation inadequate. He comprehended that roaring mood. It was inspired by something deeper, loftier, than meat. There was a hunger not of the stomach.

The fact that his own supper would have to wait was the least of his troubles. He could explain to his wife, and she would understand; but he couldn't explain to Burrough, the new scenario editor of Cosmos. Jedway had tried that. What difference did it make to Burrough that "Satan's Wife" had no plot, that its main situation would never get by the censor, that the whole concoction was vile in any case?

"It's a catchy title, isn't it? The public's lapped it up already to the tune of twenty editions, hasn't it? We've already got half a million of free advertising on the strength of it, haven't we?"

Oh, what was the use? It was Jedway's private opinion that Burrough had got a rake-off somewhere, or that the book had been written by his wife's cousin, or something like that; but he put this and kindred thoughts out of his mind as unworthy. Maybe Burrough was right, after all. There must have been some reason why the New York office should have sent him out to take charge of the scenario department on the Coast.

However, the thought would persist in Jedway's mind that Burrough, at best, was hardly a man to foster the more spiritual side of pictures. Life, to him, was merely a satisfying of certain limited and primitive

appetites. This was what he meant when he spoke of "giving the people what they want." He was an apostle of the punch, of the sex appeal, of the clinch in the final fade-out.

The worst of it was that Burrough could always claim that he was right. He had peddled films. He had run a motion picture theater of his own. He knew the game from the exhibitor's angle. Where was the mere scenario writer who could tell him what the public might prefer?

The sun still lay hot on the brown California hills, but it was sinking fast. From where Jedway sat he could look out across the broad San Fernando valley, now shimmering in a haze of blue and gold. Beyond the valley the Sierra Madre lifted its dim, serrated profile behind range after range of lesser hills.

For a moment the little scenario writer contemplated all this with a spasm of joyful admiration that was almost ecstasy. He had a passion for the open spaces, for nature in all of its unspoiled manifestations. In this moment he dreamed of the day when he would have money enough—and nerve enough—to break away with his wife and little Dan, their crippled heir, to live on the high mountain ranch they had dreamed about.

There must have been something transforming in the dream; for now, as Jedway lifted his face and threw back his narrow shoulders, he almost looked the sturdy pioneer.

After all, he was something of a man. He had his cuffs turned back, and there was black, coarse hair on his nervous little arms. He must have come from a virile stock. There was patient courage in the gray eyes back of his spectacles.

After his flash of joy—almost of liberation—his attention came back to the unfinished scenario, and he shrank a little. He lost his fire. As he bent to his work, his head once more looked too large for his body.

The worst of it was that he could visualize his own state. He was a worm, and he admitted it. This task upon which he was engaged was a loathsome one. It was an insult to his soul. Here he was, the product of a million-parented evolution, the sum total of a billion prayers, dreams, sacrifices, martyrdoms, shell-torn flags, shouts of victory, and smiles in the presence of certain death; yet he bent the glory and

majesty of all of this to an unclean task, to the vile preliminaries, of making a rotten film out of a welter called "Satan's Wife," at the behest of a man like Burrough!

The sun went down, blazing to the last, behind hills of burnished copper at the valley's other end, thirty miles away. The greens of the endless irrigated flats went softer, and from all this there seemed to emerge an atmosphere that was like a thin purple smoke, suffused in its higher reaches with scarlet and gold. Through the mist, the surrounding mountains were transformed. They became great entities, gentle and alive, as at the dissolving of a spell that had held them locked in the granite.

Yet during all this time—and later, while the swift night closed in—Jedway, who loved such scenes, never lifted his head. Once he had reached up his hand automatically and switched on the naked electric globe above his head. He had reached the fifty-third scene—where the vamp had finally lured young Oswald to her home—and he was going fast. In the wide nocturnal silence of the back ranch, the clicking of his typewriter went smashing out of the little cabin where he worked like the tremendous snarl of a machine gun.

All things are relative. Suddenly the clang of his machine went small, and Jedway stopped writing—he didn't know just why. All he knew was that his heart was thumping because of something he had heard—something strange and swiftly disturbing, like a noise that might awaken one in the night.

He was wide awake. Gone was his figment of "Satan's Wife" and the vamp's cruel machinations. All that he could hear now was a chirr of crickets. He wished that the creatures would keep still for a minute, so that he could hear that other sound—whatever it was—again.

He was pleasantly frightened. It was almost an elation. He was beginning to believe that the thing that had disturbed him was merely some effect of his creative imagination. Perhaps "Satan's Wife" was not going to be so rotten, after all. It was getting under his skin. It might easily become the masterpiece that would finally make him famous and fetch him to the summits of real money.

Then he did hear it again—the sound that had set his heart to thumping. This time there was no doubt as to the nature



of it—no doubt whatsoever. It was the snorting, strangling *whoof* of a lion, and it sounded from close by—not more than a dozen yards away.

## II

JEDWAY pushed his chair back from his typewriter, and stood up. He was tremulous with an immense excitement. Fright was knocking about in his chest like the chop and wash of rough waters; yet afloat on this jerky sea was some sort of a mental lifeboat, in which his consciousness rode, and in which he felt safe. It was a hard situation to comprehend—something very remote from the psychology of any movie he had ever written.

The lion was silent now, but he felt that it was still there. He listened. He used the lull in an effort to think.

Something must have gone wrong down at the menagerie. With a sudden pang of conscience, Jedway regretted that he had predicted a catastrophe, had privately almost hoped that something like this would happen.

As he stood there, he had a vision of Miller, head keeper of the zoo, explaining to the general manager how he happened to let a lion get loose. Jedway could see the keeper's bitter face confused with humility and stifled rage—humility for the general manager, rage for the beasts under his care. To those captive animals, down there, Miller must have been what Burrough was to the caged scenario writers.

There was a slinky footstep in the dead grass and dried oak leaves just in front of the cabin. Jedway swiftly put out a hand to turn off the electric light.

He paused. His fear had left him. Those choppy waves in his breast were still. He was in that mental lifeboat, and now he knew what the lifeboat was—the saving thought that this unruly lion was a comrade.

Yet his action came quite as a surprise even to himself as he pulled open the cabin door and peered out. He had swung the electric globe over with him. As he threw the light out into the surrounding darkness, he saw a tawny mass of muscle, a shaggy head, two burning emeralds for eyes. The lion and he were almost face to face.

"Emir!" quoth Jedway.

He had recognized the animal at the first glance. It was a young Abyssinian lion which had been brought to the menagerie,

with a young female of the species, not more than four months ago.

It was four months ago that Jedway and his typewriter had been installed in the cabin on the hill. Every day since then, at the noon hour, he had rambled down to the zoo, to eat the lunch his wife prepared for him. He loved all animals, and he commiserated with these captives. He was one himself.

Above all, he felt a sympathy for the two young lions from the African hills. He had learned much of Miller's unholy conception of an animal trainer's work; and in his heart, as he stood there now, he experienced a riot of joy that Emir had escaped from captivity.

Emir had stopped in his tracks and half turned. His near forepaw was raised, but his balance was perfect. Except for a vibrant twitching that ran through the whole of his splendid frame, and was exaggerated in the black tip of his tail, he was absolutely rigid.

Jedway was rigid also. He and the lion stood there and looked at each other for what seemed, to Jedway, endless seconds. So they had looked at each other often and long, in the menagerie, during the scenario writer's noonings.

What could have been Emir's thoughts during this confrontation?

Tiger, Tiger, burning bright—

In Emir's green eyes—shifting from green to yellow, then back to green again—there was something more than mere blank amazement. So it seemed to Jedway, and he wondered what the look might portend. Still, there was no fear in his heart—nothing but a sort of crisping admiration, a quite absurd desire to congratulate the brute on having escaped from Miller's keeping.

What followed was so swift as to escape even a mind so trained to quick analysis as Jedway's own. Everything happened at once—to be sorted out afterward, like the wreckage following a smash-up.

There came the crashing of a double-barreled shotgun, a splash of blood and fur, a landslide as Emir went by, and, finally, darkness and silence.

Then Jedway found himself talking excitedly to Miller.

The keeper, cool and blasphemous, was explaining how, in another moment, Emir would have had Jedway's blood. Miller was almost gay as he reloaded his gun. One

would have said—as Jedway did in his heart—that the keeper of the menagerie was reveling in this chance to use buckshot in order to get even.

### III.

"I've got to get back," said Miller, "and look to the cages."

Jedway went with him.

The menagerie was housed in a collection of ramshackle buildings surrounded by a high board fence. A couple of arc lamps on high poles illuminated this wild animal village, the greenish light and hard shadows giving the effect of an artificial moonlight. The weird scene and the chaos of sounds were enough to stir the pulse of almost any man, for such animals as were visible through the bars and meshes that formed the sides of the buildings were all in movement, and each was expressing, after his own kind, the knowledge that something was wrong.

There were almost a score of big cats—leopards, tigers, lions. These were the most in evidence as they trotted back and forth, growling and roaring. It was a jungle orchestra to which a dozen half wild dogs, also caged, contributed their barks and howls.

Old Bombo, the elephant, was thudding the sides of his barn to an accompaniment of an anvil chorus sent out by his clanking chains. The monkeys were giddy with excitement. They skipped and gibbered and banged their trapezes. They shrieked the latest bulletins from cage to cage.

Only Joe Sweeny, of the entire simian band, was silent and motionless. Joe was a large orang-utan, labeled dangerous since a year ago, when he had almost made the most of a chance that came his way to murder Miller with no other weapon than his long black paws. He now sat in a front corner of his cage, with one of his incredible arms curved up and outside the bars. The arm was like a hairy tree trunk, from behind which the simian philosopher took note of things.

"Subhuman, human, superhuman," said Jedway to himself, repeating a phrase that had come to him before in his contemplation of the big ape.

As Jedway went past, Joe let his hairy arm drop, and extended his hand. The little scenario writer put out his own hand, and touched the tips of the gnarled black

fingers. Now and then Jedway had slipped a banana into that murderous paw. Perhaps Joe was his friend, perhaps not. Joe was what Jedway himself would have called "inscrutable."

But it was in Sultana, the young Abyssinian lioness, that Jedway was most interested just now. He saw her in her cage, but one removed from that of the orang-utan. She was pacing restlessly, like the other cats, but she made no noise. Oftener than the others she paused to stare and listen.

She was superbly lithe. She struck Jedway as eagerly expectant, as if she were equipped and ready for some great adventure—an adventure like that upon which Emir was already launched. Sultana, in her cage, must have known things about Emir's enterprise that no man could ever have dreamed of.

Miller had just finished his inspection of Emir's broken cage when the next event befell. This time Jedway had a clear enough view of at least part of the incidents that led up to the consummation.

His first impulse was to cry out that there was Emir—that Emir had returned, possibly for hospital treatment as a result of Miller's load of buckshot. The wide gate of the menagerie inclosure was open. There, in the artificial moonlight that flooded the whole place, Jedway had seen Emir appear. The splendid young lion was more like an apparition than a living wild animal. He had come boldly, with his head and his tail up, and he had growled a challenge as he took a swift survey of the animal village from the open gate. All the other beasts had gone silent, even the monkeys.

Then, before Jedway could cry out his tidings, Emir had charged, and Miller was down.

Jedway started to run. Perhaps he could frighten Emir off. Perhaps he could draw the keeper away before the lion finished him. His thoughts were somewhat fragmentary and jumbled, but they were perfectly distinct. In any case, Jedway was aware that he would have to arise to the occasion, and that the occasion was not one for hesitation or caution.

He had taken possibly three or four steps when something happened. A hairy tree trunk had struck him across the breast and was holding him there, was drawing him back.

"Subhuman, human, superhuman"—the phrase smote through his choking mind as he realized that the orang-utan had taken him in charge.

He was doubly helpless. He was paralyzed. Even if he hadn't been, he was as impotent as a rag baby. Somewhat as if he were a doll, Joe Sweeny was fondling him. One huge black hand was on his shoulder. Another was stroking his face. Both hands were gentle enough, but they were as implacable as steel.

Looking up, Jedway saw Emir leap to the roof of Sultana's cage. There was a crashing upheaval of planks and canvas; and only then—like a gleam in the midst of a nightmare—Jedway knew why Emir had returned, and understood Sultana's fearful expectancy of a while ago.

#### IV

THERE had come a hiatus in Jedway's chain of observations. Only vaguely could he remember how Joe Sweeny had released him unscathed, how the yard of the menagerie had become crowded with ranch hands. There, for a time, it was all confusion. Through this confusion Jedway had rambled around like a lost soul, knowing more than any one else knew, and yet with no one willing to listen to him.

There were things enough that he himself didn't know until he was told. Miller had been carried off to the studio hospital. Reports were conflicting as to how badly he had been hurt. There were two lions missing—Emir and Sultana. As to the manner of their going, no one seemed to care; and, on second thought, Jedway had decided to hold his peace.

There was one idea that had stuck in the back of his brain during all of the confusion. It was emerging now still more clearly and unmistakably. It was that he, Jedway, had in some manner been set apart, had been recognized as one of the elect.

The animals had treated him as a friend, had taken him into their confidence. He had stood face to face with a lion, he had felt the embrace of a man-killing ape, and he was unhurt. He had a heady sensation of having understood the events of this night as no other man understood them.

One of the cowboys, whom Jedway knew and admired under the name of Red, met him in the dusty darkness, and casually mentioned that the whole outfit was turning out for a lion hunt.

"Can I go along?" Jedway asked.

"Sure!" said Red. "You can go along with me, if you want to. We're going to go out in pairs, and scatter. Ever ride a hoss?"

Jedway answered that he had. As a matter of fact, he had ridden a horse to pasture, as a boy, and that was enough.

The adventure spirit was racing strong within him. The thought of his typewriter in the shack on the hill—or even of supper and bed—was intolerable. He had looked into the eyes of a lion. He had been fondled by Joe Sweeny. He would have tackled any horse on the ranch; but Red was both wise and kind. After saddling his own broncho, he saddled for Jedway's use a cow pony who had served her day on the range, and was now as gentle to the will of her rider as a man's own mother might have been.

That was what Red said. He called her "old gal," and told Jedway that "she wouldn't get het up whatever happened."

Jedway had telephoned home. It brought peace to his soul, the way his wife accepted his statement that a couple of lions had escaped, and that he was going out to help to look for them. No, there was no danger, he said, and he would be sure to take care of himself.

He had often talked to Amy about his visits to the menagerie. She understood and sympathized. She always knew a lot he didn't have to tell her. He understood the hope she had expressed that they would not hurt the animals.

Jedway felt the same hope, and it was persistent now as Red led the way, by dusky trails to Jedway unknown, out through the back ranch and into the rocky, wooded wilderness locally known as Griffith Park.

Here they lingered and scouted for an hour or two, meeting other searchers in the dark. Gradually Jedway and his companion drew away from the others, and were headed out across the valley toward the hills on the other side. They were following a pleasant byway, where the earth was soft to their horses' feet. There were no houses on this road, and no other traffic. It led straight away through the mysterious gloom, as if it had been conjured there for them alone.

Red, ever on the alert, spoke softly of many things. As for him, he never had a cent; but he wasn't sorry. He mailed so much every month to his mother. That was



about all that money was good for. Otherwise, it merely got you into trouble.

"Shucks!" said Red. "I never was no good. I sort of like to take a chance. I hadn't ought to do it; but turn me loose under the stars on a night like this, and I'd chuck any job, if I didn't like it, or didn't like the boss!"

Jedway heard, but he didn't listen. The old cow pony ambled along between his knees with a motion so gentle that half the time he could forget that he was mounted. Red's voice came to him only in pleasant, occasional snatches, like half heard music.

Jedway had fallen under the spell of the night. The spell was a compound of newly cut alfalfa, of a tepid breeze, of blue darkness, of a million stars, of a sleeping land watched over by hills that loomed black but friendly against a silver mistiness.

After an hour or so of this they struck the slopes of the foothills on the other side of the valley. Here, by almost imperceptible degrees, the road became a trail that entered a cañon. This was all unknown country to Jedway, but Red knew it perfectly. Once, long ago, he had worked on a ranch hereabouts. He was headed for a water hole that he knew of, back in the hills. It was a place much favored by the coyotes and bobcats of the region. True, admitted Red, the lions might have watered in the river, but that would have been a little too close to the home ranch, the place the varmints were running away from.

"Red," said Jedway, "do you know that I kind of feel sorry for those lions? I sort of hope they won't be caught."

Red was noncommittal. He grinned genially at Jedway through the gloom. Perhaps he was too much of a gentleman to express his opinion on his companion's remark. Perhaps all honest cowboys consider scenario writers a trifle loco.

"You set here," he said, "and watch the top of that ridge up there. There's a bunch of chaparral around on the other side where the lions have holed up, mebbe. I'll ride around there and scare them out—if they're there. They'll break for the higher ground following the ridge." He grinned again. "I guess there won't be no shootin' yet a while."

After Red left him, Jedway let the cow pony graze at her ease. The spell of the night held him more strongly than ever. There had come into it a spiritual element which he had only vaguely apprehended

before—the majesty of creation, and the greater majesty of man's relation thereto.

He was a man. So was Red. So, perhaps, were Emir and Joe Sweeny—brothers all! It was a perception of the universal brotherhood when Emir had looked at him from outside the cabin, and he had looked at Emir. It was a confirmation of it when the orang-utan had stroked his face, as if inviting him to keep silent while Emir and Sultana completed their escape from a hateful bondage.

The look that Emir had given him took on a new significance in Jedway's thought. His heart swelled a little at the idea of having had such a friend.

The cow pony raised her head with a snort. She curved her graceful neck and looked at the ridge, her ears thrown forward and her muzzle in a quiver; but she did not bolt. She was true to the reputation that Red had given her.

Along the dark profile of the ridge, against a silver mist of starlight, Jedway witnessed the swift passage of two crouching forms. He knew that Emir and Sultana were headed for the mountains.

"God bless you!" he ejaculated in his heart.

## V

JEDWAY went home and went to sleep just when the dawn was beginning to break. He could imagine what this daybreak would mean to the young lion pair, far back, by this time, in some rocky fastness of the Sierra Madre.

He had a feeling that he had come into the possession of something precious, something that he must guard with his life, something that he must never, never lose. As yet he wasn't quite sure what this something was; but the feeling was with him when he awoke at the regular time, after only an hour or two of sleep.

His wife wanted him to stay at home and rest. She had things to say about the fidelity that would take a man back to work so early in the morning after he had worked all night. It wasn't a life. It was drudgery without recompense. It was slavery.

Privately, Jedway agreed with everything she said; but he held his peace. He was garnering the fruits of this memorable night's experience.

He didn't have much to say until he stood in the presence of Burrough, the scenario editor, along toward noon. That was when

Burrough consented to see him. Even then, the editor was inclined to be rough.

"Well!" he said. "Make it snappy! Have you got it finished?"

"Got what finished?" Jedway inquired.

He knew now what it was—the precious gift that had been bestowed upon him by the events of the night.

Burrough let out a sort of grunt, and whirled to look at the little man with angry contempt.

"'Satan's Wife'!" he roared. "You've had the thing long enough to know what I'm talking about!"

Jedway neither smiled nor winced. He met Burrough's eyes unflinchingly.

"I've decided not to go on with it," he said. "The thing's vile and unworthy. You can have it."

He intended to say more, but he discovered that he didn't have to. All he had to do was to look at Burrough. The more he looked at the man, the more he felt that in his eyes was the expression that had been in Emir's eyes the night before, when the lion was challenging the world, and risking death for a chance to recover his liberty, his lionhood.

That was it! This was lion stuff, and he had it! He could tell that by the way Burrough sputtered into silence and then shrank.

The scenario editor didn't have another word to say. He was in the presence of the inscrutable. Finally Jedway turned in silence, and left the office, knowing that he was through.

A severer test was ahead of him, he knew. What would Amy say when he told her that he had no job, that the check he was bringing home with him would be the last in no man knew how many moons?

As a matter of fact, she fell on his neck and wept. He had foreseen the tears. He was ready for them. He drew himself up. He was sustained by some vision of Emir and Sultana alone in the mountains in a strange land, and he was not afraid; but he wasn't prepared for Amy's almost instant recovery.

"We'll live," she said, "and little Dan will live. I just know he'll get strong out in the mountains. We can keep chickens and goats. We'll both work. We'll raise our own things. We can all be together!"

"And I haven't told you the biggest news of all," said Jedway, with a choke. "On my way home I stopped in and saw old

man Jones. He'll let us have his flivver for thirty-five bones."

And so it happened that within a week they were trailing off into the mountains. The flivver was magnificent. It carried everything. It never boiled once.

They rediscovered the old truth that the earth is a mother. They were as children sheltered and nourished against the maternal breast. There were means of earning a living unimagined in the days of the old captivity, and almost countless. They came to anchor at last in a mountain ranch that they could buy, if they wanted to, and have a hundred years in which to pay for it.

A new faith had come into their lives. It was a faith that banished worry. Perhaps they would live for a hundred years. If they didn't, that wouldn't worry them, either.

It was in this mountain retreat that Red came to see them one day. He was a forest ranger now, stationed less than twenty miles away. He was going to make a pleasant and valuable neighbor.

"I've never forgotten about those lions," said Jedway, as he filled his pipe after supper.

"Neither have I," grinned Red, as he licked his cigarette.

"I kind of hear them talking to me," Jedway went on, "every time I hear the thunder mumbling back in the hills. So they never heard anything more of them?"

"They made a clean get-away," Red answered reflectively. "We trailed them for the better part of two months, and once or twice we thought we had them; but they always gave us the slip. You know, I've always had a sort of crazy idea that those two lions had all the other wild animals scoutin' for them—the coyotes and the wolves, the bobcats and the panthers. Do you think such a thing could be?"

"I do," Jedway replied.

He told Red about the loving attention he had received on the night of the break-away from Joe Sweeny, the orang-utan.

"The last we heard of them," said Red, "was that they were safe across the line down in Mexico, where there are jungles, and game, and everything to make lions happy. I sort of like to think of them living happy down there, raising their cubs and everything. That sure would be better than living caged up in a zoo!"

"You bet!" agreed Jedway.

# The Discard

A ROMANCE OF INDIA—THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A MAN  
WHOM CIVILIZATION CAST OUT

By Kenneth Perkins

Author of "Queen of the Night," etc.

GREGORY ROSS and Major Dysart, passengers on the Shah Jehan, bound for Madras, are rivals for the favor of Verna Smith-Vincent. Gregory loses a reckless bet with the major, the stake being an elaborate dinner, and simultaneously the officer announces his engagement to the girl. Beaten in love, and unable to pay for the dinner, Ross jumps overboard. He is picked up by a fishing boat, and lands in the little native state of Pangal, a neglected corner of British India.

Supreme power in Pangal is divided between a native prince, the Gaekwar, and a renegade Englishman, Grimsby Sahib. Attacked by the Gaekwar's soldiers, Ross is rescued by followers of Grimsby, and agrees to enter the renegade's service. His first commission is to be a raid upon the house of a French planter in the hills, and the seizure of the planter's daughter, Grimsby justifying this arbitrary act by representing that it will save the girl from a forced marriage to a half-breed.

Before Ross starts, the Gaekwar sends for him. The prince takes a fancy to the stranger because he resembles the old ruler's dead son, and offers him any gift he may choose. Preferring to take things of little value, Ross asks for a discarded runt elephant, a yellow cur which he has seen a hostler beating, and an apparently insignificant trinket worn by the Gaekwar. These—although the trinket proves to be a much prized talisman—are given him, and in flowery language the old prince bids him prepare to go in quest of a rare blossom that blooms in a garden beyond the Pangal jungle.

## VIII

COMING out of the cool darkness of the Gaekwar's dallan, Ross felt the hot blast of daylight upon his face. He was alone and helpless, bewildered with compacts, promises, and threats, enslaved by that accursed stone about his neck. With a vague feeling that he would gain a friend and a companion, he searched out that pariah dog.

The hostler whose special duty it had been to give the dhole dog a daily beating had already heard the extraordinary news. The beast had been promised as a gift to the crazy white man who had come out of the sea—out of Kali Pani, the black water!

"Why do you beat that dog?" Ross asked.

"I follow the command of the Gaekwar, the protector of the poor, the twice-born, the son of Heaven."

"But the dog is not his—it is mine."

"One last thrashing, then! This dog is

an incarnation of an enemy of the Gaekwar's. Therefore, when I beat the dog, I beat the enemy."

"Which is a damnable lie!" Ross cried. "Has the brute done no other harm?"

The dog, Ross could not help admitting to himself, was a surly cur. Its gleaming white fangs were bared with every whimper, with every cry of pain, as the bamboo ripped his back. Its eyes were yellow and set wide apart, and the sore, bald skin of its forehead wrinkled precisely like the forehead of an old man. It actually seemed, as the native protested, to be a human being in a peculiar and bestial incarnation.

"No other harm, sahib," said the hostler, "save only to exist; and in existing it is a habitation for that villain's soul—the enemy of my lord the king."

The native held up the bamboo preparatory to a last cut across the dog's sore-ridden back; but a steel vise gripped his wrist—a white hand digging into the brown flesh.



"Sahib!" he cried in pain. "For what reason before the gods will you prevent this just act? I am weak and lowly, sahib, and you break my miserable and filthy hand!"

"And I'll break your back, too, you sniveling little rat!" Ross yelled in rage. He snatched the rattan from the man's hand, and sliced a good blow across his shoulders. "Go and fetch a bowl of water for this poor creature that you were beating to death. It is my dog, and whoever whips my dog will himself be whipped!"

With an abject fear of the supernatural strength of this mahoo, as well as of the amulet that he wore, the native crawled away, whimpering. A moment later he came back with a brass lota of water. Other servants congregated—hostlers from the stables across the court, bomos and mahouts from the keddah, which adjoined the stables.

"Do not approach the dog, sahib," one man called out. "He will rend you to pieces!"

The picture that the animal presented was not very inviting. Surrounded by bones, his patchy, bleeding back pestered by all manner of green and purple flies, he seemed like a ferocious leopard held in captivity by those rusty chains. Hardly a dog, except for his eyes, and a patch of leathery black which was his snout, he seemed to be a cross between a gaunt wolf and a tiger.

With an instinctive belief that the old dog had understood the general meaning of the blow struck across the back of the native who had persecuted him, Ross approached within the radius of the chain. The beast looked up with open eyes, the glaring yellow turning almost colorless as the pupils contracted. A murderous look, if ever there was one!

Putting the brass lota on the sand, Ross pushed it forward. The dog looked up at the tall, white-clad, white-faced figure, sniffed suspiciously, and then drank with a loudly flopping tongue. He drank the lota dry and tipped it over with his snout, in the hope of getting more.

Then he looked up, the hide of his forehead wrinkling up and down, his brows contracting over his yellow eyes as he faced the sun. What was this white being who had snatched that dreaded bamboo from the native and whipped him, instead of whipping the dog? What was this creature whose hands were white instead of black,

who gave water when the sun was hottest, who came close enough to give him—the dog—a chance to wreak upon humanity the vengeance that he had always craved?

What was this person who smelled differently from the black, oil-bathed natives? What was this godlike figure who had come close enough to be killed, but who had miraculously killed all desire for vengeance? It was not a man, but a god—not an enemy, but a savior. It was a supreme master to be feared, to be loved with all a dog's love, to be worshiped, to be followed!

It was not hard to read the animal's thoughts. They were written all over his lacerated body. His hide was as expressive as the skin of a man's face. He stiffened slightly as Ross put out a hand to touch him. Then the wiry yellow hair flattened down, the tail, which until now had been tightly tucked between his legs, lifted slightly, and there was an almost imperceptible wag. The black snout was lifted. It sniffed at the man's hand, and the tongue came out and licked it.

Ross unchained the brute, and the crowd of bomos and hostlers threw up their hands and yelled in fright. They scampered in all directions, crying:

"What manner of man is this, that he is not afraid of being torn to bits? Lo, he has unchained the beast, and it follows at his heels!"

"What is he—a mahoo, or a god?"

"He is the sahib from Kali Pani, the black water!"

"The sahib to whom the king has given a token!"

"The sahib whom all the gods of the earth and the sea and the forest will protect forever!"

That was the meeting between Gregory Ross and his dog—the first friend he had found since landing in the discard.

The next—which was the elephant—was not quite so definite a compact of eternal faith between man and beast.

The elephant, so any mahout will say, is the most intelligent of animals, not excepting a dog or an ape; but they did not say this of the particular specimen that was to belong to Ross. This elephant was famous more for its abnormal appetite than for its mentality. Since an elephant's chief claim to distinction lies in its imposing size, this little runt was a definite failure; and he had, so Ross was told, all the qualities which are avoided when an elephant is pur-

chased either for temple, teak yards, or durbar.

He had protuberances on the tail and under the chin—black and red growths like warts on a toad. He had a black-roofed mouth—which, according to the king's mahout, was a most serious blemish. His tusks were streaked with black and red, and they curved outward—which meant that they were worthless if cut off, and ridiculous if left on.

He had a low forehead, he had ears so broad that they met. He had a long, thin, shapeless trunk and a tail that reached to the dust, and on it were hairs that grew in two different ways—another bad sign. He had red, vicious-looking eyes and a black tongue.

"We cannot keep him in the elephant lines," the mahout said to Ross, "for he makes much trouble. He cramps the ears of the bulls near him with his trunk end. He trumpets and bellows all day long. He grabs the tail of the bull in front of him with his teeth—a miserable trick—for no reason, look you, but to make an abomination out of himself. As for work, sahib, you can get no more work out of this mierga than out of a private of the subahdar system. If you place him behind a cart to push it, he will hold his forehead an infinitesimal space behind it—the space of an inch or less—and make a pretense of pushing, as I have seen lazy and ill-tempered coolies make a pretense of working when in reality they do nothing. So it is with this vicious, red-eyed dwarf. He is ticklish, he is fidgety, he wags his tail—which is a measly habit. He has a trick of shaking himself free from his howdah, and he will not respond to the goad."

But you cannot look a gift elephant in the tusks. Ross stood there appraising the beast with tremendous interest and amusement. At his feet was his yellow dog; about him was a crowd of hostlers and keepers—all dressed alike, with soiled white turbans, their backs nude and glistening with sweat, their waists girdled with white cotton cloth gathered and tucked at their stomachs.

Out of this crowd there crawled an old man—Muhutma Daj, the mahout. He wore a ragged, dusty turban and loin cloth. He had a pigeon chest covered with white hair, long, lean arms, and huge hands, so long as to touch the hot dust with his knuckles as he waddled up to Ross. All

that could be seen of his face was a huge under lip, a few broken, betel-stained teeth, and a chin salted with white whiskers.

"Sahib, hearken to my voice! I, Muhutma Daj, am a wise man in the wisdom of bomos. Take this elephant as a great gift, for it is possessed of seventy and seven devils if it bears a grudge. So they say of all gundas, but of this particular gunda it may be said in very truth. Dwarfed he is, even as I, Muhutma Daj, but his strength surpasses the strength of the queen of a herdyea, even of a gunda in must. If he had a mind to, he could move a Juggernaut down the streets of the city!"

Much laughter from the crowd greeted this announcement.

"He can fight the nakoos of the river banks, and slay them, for he will not suffer them to get his trunk between their jaws, as larger and slower elephants will."

This was also answered with guffaws.

"Take him and be blessed with him, sahib," continued Muhutma Daj. "Thank me for the favor I do you in telling you this great truth; and to reward me," he added in a different voice, "make me your mahout!"

"I thank you, but who the devil are you?"

"He was once a mahout in the Madras Presidency—at Bangalore, at Madura, and at Madras," said one of the bystanders. "He speaks many languages—Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, English, for he has ridden elephants for English hunters and for many rajahs; but now that he is old, he spends his time eating opium and dreaming dreams. What he says about this runt elephant is a pleasantry, if ever there was one—in particular his joke concerning its fight with the crocodiles."

"But can you handle a gunda that is ticklish, as they say of this beast, that wags his tail, that won't kneel or obey the goad, Mr. Daj?" Ross asked of the old fellow squatted before him.

The other grinned superciliously. What a question! What a nonsensical way to talk to a man who had been the mahout of the Rao of Ramgad! What a query to put to the man who had been a shikari to the governor-general!

"Sahib," he replied, after snapping his fingers, "there is no elephant in the jungle but that I know the mantras to subdue him. I know that if you put the copper of cannon in a bowl of water and bathe the head,

the elephant will obey your goad. I know that if great red caterpillars are rubbed over this gunda's thighs, he will no longer be ticklish. I know that if you rub ashes of flotsam on his tail, he will not wag it. I know that if you chew the kanchi plant and spit the juice on his joints, he will kneel."

"Enough!" Ross cried. "You're hired. Take this beast—which is your charge from now on—up to Grimsby Sahib's bungalow. He will give you orders what is to be done with it."

"I, Muhutma Daj, some time mahout to kings, know what is to be done with it. Mantras are to be prayed over it, and Nabi Noh must be thanked for the blessings of this day. And my pay—"

"Your pay will be a rupee's worth of opium each evening," Ross interrupted. "So out of my sight!"

The ragged old man salaamed so low that his turban touched the dust—a gesture which seemed quite easy for him, because of his tiny legs. He then turned around, waddled up to the elephant, and gave the beast a well-directed kick in the middle of the belly. The gunda lifted his trunk in a squeal, but abruptly stopped, to listen to what this strange dwarf was saying to him.

"My wish to subdue your wish!" were the words. "Bow down your head to the right—to the left. Sri Rama will curse you, Nabi Noh will watch over you, and I, Muhutma Daj—"

Ross did not wait to hear any more of these extraordinary mantras. He mounted the tat pony on which he had ridden down from the Grimsby bungalow, and, followed by his dog, rode out of the royal compound.

## IX

GRIMSBY was the man to be feared. Grimsby was the man without a soul, the renegade, the white man who had refused to come to the aid of another white man in distress—refused, that is to say, until he was promised his pay. Grimsby was the jungle sahib, the man who worked in darkness, whose power was greater than the Gaekwar's, whose vengeance was more greatly to be feared.

Grimsby was the man with whom Ross was forced by fate to deal as one thief dealing with another. Lies, subterfuges, dastardly compromises with a heathen tyrant, with a renegade white man, and with him-

self! Ross already felt as if he were in a black jungle, groping for light, or in a jheel, sinking deeper and deeper in the filthy ooze.

Here he was about to face Grimsby with a request for aid upon an expedition of thievery. The anticipation was revolting; but when he saw Grimsby grinning through his black teeth, spitting a red mist, guffawing over the picture the youth made as he entered the bungalow followed by the mangy dog, the business of lying proved surprisingly easy.

"I'm ready to start on my career as a robber," Ross began.

"Oh, ho! Ready for your career, is it?" the other laughed, with a venomous joviality. "Damme if I didn't think you'd be ready for the bloomin' ole crocodiles! Luck's with you—that's all! I can use luck like that in my business. Never thought I'd set eyes on you again, my cocky! What's happened?" Evidently the renegade was greatly surprised. "How did you manage the bloodthirsty ole devil, I'd like to know? Was he afeared of the stone about your neck?"

"Something was said about my resembling his son."

This sent the soiled old hulk into shivers of chuckling.

"Of all the bloomin' luck! Zowie! I reckon it was that stone, arter all, me lad; and it 'll stand you in good stead when you're trekkin' back there in the stinkin' jungle."

Ross laughed.

"Bally rot!" he said scornfully.

"Yes—bally rot! Course you'll say it's bally rot! But did you ever hear of that little shiny pebble they calls a snake stone in these parts? You puts it on a cobra bite—stone clings to bite—venom's sucked into stone—stone falls off—you're cured! Yes—bally rot! I'll say it for you!" he spat out, as Ross uttered an oath of disgust. "That there head is a snake stone. You're goin' to trek it through snake-ridden jheels and swamps a plenty. It 'll come in handy; and if the bloomin' animals ain't afeared of it, at least you'll find the heathen are!"

"The Gaekwar let me keep this stone," Ross said, "in order that I may be able to carry out his orders."

"His orders!" cried Grimsby, in a tone of surprise. "His orders, eh?" He stared for a moment, revolving the betel pan in



his mouth. "What's he been sayin' to you, I'd like to know? You're mine—don't forget that. You ain't body servant to no black heathen the likes of him. You're white—and you're mine!"

"It so happens that in order to save my life I had to consent to go on a certain quest, to a hill town called the Saddle of the Heavenly Horse, or something of that sort. An enemy of the Gaekwar is to be killed, and I'm the appointed executioner."

The other opened his black mouth—whether to object, to curse, to laugh, or to spit, was not apparent. He closed it again, and nodded his head seriously.

"So be it! The damned double-crossing stink! Saw you had a bit of muscle, and he tykes you away from me! And his quests have precedence, too—he told you that, maybe?"

"As I remember—"

"Damn him! All right! And I got to supply the kit—that's the worst of it—two 'orses and a shikari, begad, out o' my own purse! But you remember this, my cocky—when you've done it, you're mine!"

"The Gaekwar admits that."

This seemed to pacify the storming Grimsby for the time. He shrugged his shoulders, and then called to his matey.

"Outfit this bloke in a khaki suit for the jungle. Clean that there Luger pistol of mine. Give him plenty of ammunition, and provisions for three days. Quick about it, now, Mr. Bodylouse! All right, me lad! Follow him and get some jungle clothes on. I'll tyke a look at the tat ponies."

Ross followed the servant, and Grimsby went out to the garden.

A rotunda of chunamed pillars and tiled roof stood attached to the lower veranda roof. It served as the terminal of the garden road, where vehicles, horses, or elephants were brought up, so that guests could dismount in the shade and enter the bungalow without a single sunbeam touching them. Under this rotunda Grimsby Sahib saw a sight that made him explode in slobbery guffaws.

The runt elephant was standing there, weaving back and forth restlessly, snuffing circles in the dust of the road, and wagging a hairy, ratlike tail. His mahout, a shapeless little old man, was gesticulating, prodding, swearing, in his attempt to keep the beast from eating the veranda plants.

"What the 'ell is this, I'd like to know? A menagerie, s'help me!" Grimsby cried,

as he went down the veranda steps. "Blimy, now I remember—the fool white man asked Gaekwar for a miera which was goin' to be shot. So this is the state elephant the bloke's goin' to ride out to conquer the jungle with, is it?"

He burst out again in a convulsion of laughter at that dwarfed bunch of bones, warts, hair, unshapely ears, and grotesquely twisted tusks.

"An ill-favored thing," the mahout said humbly. "His tusks are worthless and his chin has warts. His toes are black and his stature is meager; but what of that? Whom the gods stunt in stature they make great in wisdom—as, for instance, myself, Muhutma Daj!"

Another jeer from Grimsby.

"I warn you, sahib, not to laugh at this pack elephant. Brahma has denied it beauty and grace, but he has blessed it with a soul!"

Indeed, the animal itself seemed to have an uncanny conception of the fact that it was being laughed at. It stopped dead still in its fidgeting, and focused its narrow red eyes upon the hulking white man, as if carefully studying him. Then the beast's ears began to flop nervously back and forth.

"Looks like he could fly with them ears!" Grimsby howled. "Fust thing you know, he'll be sailin' off like a kite!"

Although it was not in any way probable that the runt elephant understood Grimsby's words, it was quite obvious that he was not pleased with the sound of the voice that uttered them. He shuffled his feet, like a bull that is going to charge, stood still again, narrowed his glittering red eyes to a sharper focus, and then swung slowly forward, circling around Grimsby and studying him from behind.

"Now what?" Grimsby said in a changed voice. "You ain't lettin' him out of control, you blasted little tick?"

There seemed to be some cause for Grimsby's alarm. As the animal slowly shuffled a complete circle around the man who had laughed at him, he gave the impression of a beast stalking its prey.

"What's the matter with him?" cried Grimsby.

"It is beyond my wisdom to explain the acts of this thing which the gods have cast away," the mahout answered.

"Is he in must?" Grimsby asked.

"I thought peradventure he was, and therefore I thrust a straw into the holes in

his cheek, and smelled it, but there was no must smell."

"Then what in 'ell's wrong with him, starin' at me like I was a bale of hay?"

"Sahib," the mahout muttered fearfully, "this gunda is most peculiar. It responds to my commands in ways that are ridiculous. For instance, when I say 'Go!' it will come; and when I say 'Come in!' it will shy off. Likewise, when I say 'Trot!' it will kneel down. A gunda without rime or reason, sahib! Nor can I approach it from the rear, as all elephants should be approached, or drive it from the left side, as you drive elephants and oxen, and as you saddle horses."

"What does it mean when he looks at you the way he's lookin' at me?" Grimsby asked, as the elephant circled around him a second time.

"Either of two things, sahib—that he likes you, or that he likes you not. Which of the two, only the gods of the jungle can decipher."

"If he comes any closer, I'll put a bullet into his carcass!" Grimsby muttered, as he started for the veranda steps.

The elephant stopped, seemingly debating whether to follow the man into the bungalow or not.

"Is he still lookin' at me?" Grimsby asked in a rather toneless voice.

"He is, sahib, and his little eyes burn like coals."

"Holy cripes!"

Ross came out, prepared for the journey. Immediately the runt elephant seemed to get out of the temper into which the laughter of Grimsby had thrown him. The beast returned to the center of the road, under the rotunda, and knelt down. Apparently he had some inkling of the fact that his master had donned hunting clothes, and was going to mount for the jungle.

"You don't mean to tell me, me lad, that you're takin' that bally little runt off into the jungle?"

"I do."

Grimsby threw up his hands.

"Fust thing you know, my cocky, it 'll go bad and kill you, and your mahout, and your tat ponies, and your dog—yes, that dog! What the 'ell? Tykin' a dog like that into the jungle! If you want a dog, I'll give you a dog that knows a thing or two about huntin'. This cur here'll run from a jackal. I'd bloomin' well like to put him in a room with my mongoose. Ha!"

He shook his head. "Me lad, take the advice of ole Grimsby. The jungle's a hard place to be without the proper outfit. What you need is a couple of good hill ponies. Shoot this elephant here and now—and the dog, too."

The yellow dog sneaked behind Ross, its tail tucked down flat, its head lowered. Its face—a surprising likeness of a human countenance contorted with passion—peered at Grimsby from behind the legs of its master.

"Yes, I'm advisin' you—shoot that cur," Grimsby said seriously. "I don't like his looks. He can't hunt. All he'll do is to take a bite out of the calf of your leg. Let me shoot him!"

Ross put up his hand.

"I'm satisfied with this outfit. Don't want your fine hunting dogs. We're going into the jungle together—we three."

"What three?"

"We three discards."

Grimsby started to laugh, his scorn increasing as he looked first at the man, a typical picture of a beach comber, then at the yellow dog, then at the runt elephant. He stopped laughing abruptly.

Something impressed him about that trio. You could laugh at each one separately, but when they were together there was a unity of desperation that could not be laughed at. They were like Cerberus—a single animal with three heads, representing intelligence, strength, and ferocity all in one—a hard combination to beat.

"Three ragged bits of twine are easily broken," one of Grimsby's mateys said to him later, "unless you weave them together into one!"

## X

THE expedition was organized. An old howdah was brought out of the go-down.

"The 'owdah what I used last time I went after the cattle lifter up in the Ghats," Grimsby explained.

This they packed with provisions, tin cans of water, rice for the travelers, and bran mash for the animals.

The guide was one of Grimsby's shikaris—a lanky, loose-jointed man with jet-black hair, frizzly beard, and fox eyes peering from under a ragged turban. His crimson jacket, green sash, and white dhoti would have formed a violent and imposing color scheme, had they not been so ragged and dusty. He rode a tat pony which, except

for its stubby legs, looked as gaunt and brown and scraggy as the scarecrow on its back.

Ross was given an undersized piebald—an exact reproduction of the shikari's animal, with the same Roman nose and hanging head, and a mane that was like a thatch of dry doob grass.

Mhutma Daj mounted his charge, spreading his little legs astride the elephant's neck, just behind the huge floppy ears.

Ross was about to mount his tat pony when Grimsby laid a hand on his arm.

"You ain't forgotten something, have you now?"

"Forgotten!" the other repeated. "Forgotten—what?"

"My pay."

Ross stared at the black-mouthed face leering up at him.

"What the devil, pay? Pay for what? This kit, I suppose. Hang it all, man, you know I haven't got a copper pice to my name!"

"Not that—our agreement. We shook hands—maybe you've forgot that so soon?"

"No, devil take it! It might be better for me if I failed in this quest—if the jungle swallowed me up—if no one ever heard of me again!"

"You don't want to come back—to me!" the other said, in a tone of mock injury. "Faugh!" He spat. "I ought to bash you one in the teeth for the yell-livered jackal you are! You're anxious enough to get out of our compact, ain't you? You think maybe there's a chanst—maybe there's two ways of dealin' with ole Grimsby. You think I do favors, and then beg you to pay me. Oh, no, not me! Not Brian Grimsby, me cocky! We made our compact when you shook my hand. That settled it. You sold your soul to the Old Bailey that time; and Old Bailey ain't goin' to let you off so easy."

He spat again. His clothes were wringing under perspiration. His face, purplish under the eyes, with veins bulging from the sallow skin, began to drip, to steam. He gave the impression that it was his anger, not the Indian climate, that was boiling him.

"Oh, no! You ain't through with Grimsby—not you! I done you a good turn. I introduced ye to the ole cutthroat as my comrade. In plain terms, I saved your bally discarded life for you! Then

you're glad enough to whine, ain't you? But it don't work. You owe me something; and I'll make you pay!"

"How?" the other demanded.

"I'll send you on a quest—that Frenchman's girl. We're agreed on that. When you're through with the Gaekwar, you've got a job to do for ole Brian Grimsby. Have you forgotten the Frenchman's girl?"

Ross laughed.

"If I come out of the jungle alive, I'll get that girl," he said, with a resolution that surprised the old renegade.

The latter looked him in the eye. There was an evenness of tone in that sentence that made it sound like a threat. Grimsby's eyes narrowed.

"Look here, Mr. Castaway, somethin' comes to my mind. Maybe you're thinkin' that when you gets beyond the jungle rim you're out of Pangal, and out of my power? Think you'll get the girl and then beat it for the railway, and not stop till you get as far as Madras? Is that it?"

"I remember your threat that I'd never get out of your power—no matter if I went to the ends of the world."

"Oh, do you remember that? Well, you clicked! I'm glad to hear it! You've clicked proper! *If you double-cross me—*"

He stared at Ross from head to foot with venomous, narrowed eyes, as if imagining just where he would strike when the time came.

"If you double-cross me, I'll—"

He did not finish. He found himself staring, not at Ross's face, but at another—a face which was peering from between Ross's legs—the low crouched head, the half human face, of the dhole dog. The eyes were focused on Grimsby with a pale, white-hot fury.

Grimsby shuddered. He had seen lepers down in the village with faces like that—thickened skin, heavy, hairless eyebrows, raw, wrinkled foreheads.

A peculiar illusion struck him. Ross, standing there with his legs apart and the dog, with head hung low, peering between his calves, looked like some two-headed monster, like the idols in the Pangal temples—a godlike head above, a devil's head below.

"I ain't goin' to truck with you while that dog's sizin' me up. Killed a native a couple o' weeks ago, he did. Get along with you, and call him off!"

Ross mounted. The dog slunk around to



the other side of the horse, and peered at Grimsby again from under the horse's belly.

"Get along!" Grimsby cried excitedly. "But don't forget—come back—to me!"

Ross shuddered. He had some conception now how those barbarians in the Middle Ages felt when they sold their souls to the devil.

Grimsby watched the expedition as it formed single file and wound through the garden to the plastered brick wall at the jungle side of the compound. The shikari led. Then came the elephant, shuffling along, its trunk swinging wide, with an anxious desire to destroy as many of the garden flowers as he could reach. Then came Ross, riding his tat pony, and followed by the dhole dog.

When they passed through the gate, Grimsby heaved a sigh of enormous relief.

"A bunch of discards!" he chuckled. "The whole kit ain't worth the snap of a finger!"

But as they disappeared in the jungle, they left with him an impression that he could not shake off the rest of that day, nor all that night, nor for a good long while thereafter. He saw the picture of an intelligent face—the face of Gregory Ross, with the keen gray eyes, the audacity, the devil-may-care smile—a man who did not seem to care a fig whether he lived or died. That was part of the picture only. There was also the face of that uncannily human dog, and there were the dwarf elephant's eyes, two tiny red dots focused intently upon him.

He was something of a savage himself, that old renegade Grimsby who had spent a good part of his life in the Indian jungle. Mixed with his jungle wisdom there was a definite strain of fear. The eyes of the runt elephant terrified him.

He went back to his bungalow, to submerge himself in the drunkenness of arrack. After the fifth drink, the teapoy turned into a dhole dog. Some time later, when he reached out to clout the matey who was serving him, he thought he was looking into the keen gray eyes of Gregory Ross. Later still, the punkah above began to flop unsteadily and belligerently, like the huge ears of an elephant.

He settled back in his veranda chair, like a toad fitting into a crevice. His bodily discomforts—prickly heat, headache, swollen feet—were numbed by alcohol.

"They're off in the jungle now, them

three," he growled softly. "The dog, the man, the gunda. When they come back—"

He jumped from his seat with an oath.

"Stop that punkah, you out there! You son of pigs, hear me! Stop it, or I'll kill you!"

The punkah hung listlessly, like a sail in a sudden calm. Grimsby stood dazed, gasping at the unexpected stillness of the heat.

"I wonder," he whispered, "which one of them three is goin' to get me!"

## XI

No expedition more grotesque than that one had ever departed from Pangal for the jungle rim. No sorrier-looking elephant was ever seen between Burma and the Khyber Pass than that runt. There was no unhappier-looking cur than that dhole dog; and there was no man whose soul was set at such an infinitesimal price as that white man's!

Thus they disappeared from the visible precincts of Pangal, and were engulfed in the wilderness of ravines and dhoons.

A hard, slow climb of an hour brought them across the first deep khud, which was like a gash cut horizontally across the long, steep rise. A tributary to the Pangal River flowed through this khud, now a flat, steaming basin, now a rippling flow of brown water over shoals, now—within a mile of its joining the river—a tumbling waterfall. Its thundering sound drowned out the distant and unceasing tom-toms of the city which Ross was leaving far behind him.

Parrots added their raucous screeching, flapping away with a flash of red and green wings as the expedition approached. Monkeys chattered and scolded on every side. What with these sounds and the Drum Water, as the Pangalese called the waterfall, the jungle lifted its voice in a deafening harmony.

At nightfall a yellowish mist settled over the khuds, as if some one had slowly drawn a woolen blanket across them. Its suffocating warmth did not lessen this illusion. The sun seemed to poise before it set, tremendous and ghastly, in a rift where the blanket of fog touched the horizon. Then the dilated ball went out, as if suddenly smothered by the pungent hot element above it.

Ross was left in a peculiar nebulous darkness, which he could feel, smell, touch. He perceived a suffocating perfume, a deaden-

ing sound of falling water, a crescendo of rhythmic sensations as of a man in a fevered nightmare. All about him the forces of death were biding their time. Poison was everywhere—in the air, crawling behind leaves, insinuating itself into his mind.

There were the elephant trails—which the shikari was always trying to avoid, but which encircled them round about like a net. Down below there was Grimsby, who would most surely pursue him sooner or later. There was the fanatical, half crazed Gackwar, like a tigress gone bad, but still with a ferocious, hungry love for its young.

Finally there was that other one across the mountains—the girl who was to be his victim. Yes, she, too, must be counted an enemy, for he was going to hunt for her like a brigand stalking a victim.

Enemies were on every side. What was his life worth? What would it be worth after he had abducted a white girl from the territory of the British Raj?

They could go no farther in that darkness—a darkness in which there were no stars, except those perfect imitations of stars, the fireflies that hung all about them. The shikari advised camping.

The old mahout cooked the curry and rice over a fire of smoking rotten wood. A canvas stool and a collapsible canvas table was set for Ross, and he ate alone, drinking whisky and "English water." His two men, being of different castes, ate with their backs to each other. Old Muhutma Daj saved a portion of his rice and curry, packing it away in a pungent ball in his turban.

The fog lifted toward midnight. The two natives had slept, while Ross, smoking innumerable cheroots, had paced up and down. They broke camp and trekked for three hours through jheels and dhoons.

The sandy shore of an upper reach of the Pangal River was their next stop. Here the old mahout took out his rice ball, which had been pressed to the exact mold of his cranium, and ate ravenously. Ross took some more whisky and soda, and tumbled off to sleep.

The ponies, hobbled in the Hindu fashion by the hind leg, as well as haltered, foraged for themselves, and got a ration of bran mash and horse plantains in the morning. They drank of the muddy river water, while the natives took coconut milk, and Ross his soda.

At ten they reached the crest of the first range of mountains. The morning fog

swept away as suddenly as the yellow blanket of the preceding evening, and from the towering cliffs to which they had climbed the travelers could see the whole stretch of Pangal, from the jungle to the sea. It did not seem far to the horizon. On the contrary, the outer circle of the sea seemed to have moved up to an extraordinary height, so that it appeared to be close at hand.

There was the coast, where the white beaches and the surf made a single broken line of silver. Nearer there was Pangal—a checkerboard of rice paddies. Beneath him, immeasurably far, there was Grimsby's bungalow, about the size of a little red and white cowrie shell. It seemed miles away—not off in the distance, but straight down below. Yes, there it was, like a tiny red and white eye staring up at Ross without winking, glaring against the sunlight like the cold eye of a karait snake.

That all-encompassing view had a curious and depressing effect upon Gregory Ross. He had traveled for hours, through khuds, jheels, and keddahs, and over crags. The jungle had taken him into her breast, enveloping him. He had felt buried away, detached from the mundane life of Pangal. He had felt like a mortal passing through the gates of death. A banyan tree on the jungle rim had given him that impression the day before. He had felt as if he had taken on a certain quality of divinity, and was now looking down from above upon that checkerboard of life, of paddies, of almost invisible maggots.

Then, all of a sudden, he was confronted with the view of that damnable bungalow down there on the plains! It was like a knife piercing into his chest to have that all brought back. It seemed as if no matter how deep into the jungle Ross went, no matter how many hours he climbed away, he could not escape Grimsby.

But it was not until a day later that he had any idea of the actual seriousness of this conflict with the jungle sahib. Then something happened which brought him definitely to the decision that either he or Brian Grimsby must die.

A long journey climbing the Ghats brought them into the clear, pure air of the summit. Ross was aflame with the excitement of his journey. He was on a strange, an uncanny quest. Its very weirdness thrilled him. His spirits became buoyant in the bracing mountain air. If it had not been for that lurking regret that he had

sold his soul to the devil, he would have been as care-free, as exuberant, as a knight hunting for heroic dangers.

For a while he forgot Grimsby. His duty—to steal a flower of rare beauty and of deadly poison—absorbed him. Never in any legend or song had he heard of such a strange adventure; and here he was but a few days removed from the era of steamships, a few miles removed from the civilization of British India, sent on pain of death to steal a poisonous flower from an oriental garden!

As he rode, he tried to visualize that flower—its color, its starry shape, its poisonous sheen, its priceless worth—something which an old decrepit Gaekwar would sacrifice lives to possess!

Every flower in the jungle suggested a different shape, a different gloss, a different texture. He saw thick, pudgy growths on the rotten logs. They had a strange resemblance to human flesh—pink, soft things that felt alive when he squeezed them. Ross imagined that the flower he sought must be something like that.

There were others in the jungle swamps like mushrooms, purple and mottled. There were still others which, when he plucked them, cut his hand with their thorns, closing up as if to bite him. Each time he found a blossom or a bud that seemed particularly strange, he would ask his guide:

"From what you have heard of this garden we're going to, do you think the flower is something like this?"

The shikari shook his head at every question. Finally, when the trail led them to the end of a falling valley, he pointed downward.

"They will tell you down there what the flower is like," he said.

In the plain below there was a clearing. The jungle, seemingly an unbroken matted wilderness of vines, bamboos, and doob grass, lay down there like a solid background of dark green. In the small cleared space there were rows of huts like beehives. A temple was the most conspicuous feature of the little village, and at the opposite end of the clearing was a bungalow. The place, it seemed, had once been a station for teak cutters. The remains of a long chute left a scar down the mountainside.

As the shikari explained to Ross, it appeared that the Gaekwar had a kinsman—some sort of petty rajah who served as an intermediary between the Pungal govern-

ment and the British. It was to this man that Ross was presented.

Utmost secrecy attended the conference. They waited until after dark. The mahout tethered his elephant and the horses in the jungle thicket, while Ross and his guide approached the village on foot.

The house had served as a residency for the teak merchant in the old days, and then as a dak bungalow for travelers. Now, the route between Pungal and the British presidency having fallen into disuse, the village found itself isolated. It was an outpost, inhabited largely by a robber caste under the domination of the Gaekwar.

Ross was ushered into the main room of the bungalow, and stood before the rajah—a fellow of enormous proportions, with a Sikh beard. A punkah flapped over his head, beating the smoke of the chirags from one side to another, like a swirling tide. Ross breathed with great difficulty.

The room was filled with Hindus, many of them bearing chirags, others armed with rifles. They were a hot, sweating crowd. The feeling that Ross had, as he stood there in the middle of them, was of a man being imprisoned and tortured by suffocation.

"His Highness the Gaekwar of Pungal has honored you," the rajah began.

Not knowing any reason why he should dispute this point, Ross concurred.

"The quest upon which he has sent you is, of course, to be attended with the utmost secrecy."

"I understand that," Ross said; "inasmuch as it is a theft."

"I will, however, lay bare the matter to you before you go any farther on your journey. The hillmen congregated in this dallan, needless to say, may be trusted. They are your clan brothers."

Ross looked around at the nondescript gang of natives. The Gaekwar's robber organization was composed of many castes, many religions—in which respect it resembled the ancient and defunct order of thugs.

"Furthermore, what I am saying to you will not be divulged for the simple reason that, with the exception of your shikari, no one here speaks English."

Ross now understood that he was in the presence of a conclave of robbers, and that the scene about to take place was something in the nature of an initiation.

"There is to be no oath," the rajah went on. "I am, however, instructed to make plain to you the fact that you are on a mis-



sion which must be carried out on pain of death."

"That part is quite clear," Ross said dryly.

"If you do not return into this jungle with the booty, any one of these men, who are agents in the various cities of the Pangal border, will by one means or another slay you."

Again Ross looked around. If he had had any wish to flinch at the duty set before him, he saw the futility of such a wish now.

"I am going through with this business," he assured the rajah. "It remains only for you to tell me where the garden is, and when I am to make the assault. I am eager to go on."

"Very well! As long as I have made it quite clear to you that there is no turning back from this quest, I will give you your final instructions."

The rajah stood up, stepped close to Ross, and said, in a tone that was too low for any one else to hear:

*"The flower you are about to gather is a woman—a woman of your own race."*

Ross paled. The thick smoke of the chigrags was beaten about him—to one side, then in a swirl to the other. His brain reeled. He thought the grizzled, bearded faces of the robbers about him spun around with the smoke.

"She is the daughter of a French indigo planter just below the jungle rim. You will go there to-morrow afternoon, before the girl is given into the hands of the East Indian to whom she is promised as wife." He turned to the shikari, and spoke in the same low voice: "Take him to the plantation of Béraud Sahib." He turned again to Ross. "Will you drink?" he asked, for he saw that Ross was white.

"Yes—it's this damnable smoke. I can't get my breath!"

A cooja of wine was brought, and a goblet filled.

"This is my oath," Ross said. "To the quest—and the flower!"

The rajah shrugged his shoulders. What need was there of an oath? It was a matter either of success or of death, irrespective of Ross's feelings in the matter.

Ross drank. As he drank, a flood of thoughts surged through his brain. Here was a white girl against whom many forces were working. Grimsby wanted her; the avaricious old Gaekwar wanted her; the

East Indian to whom she was betrothed wanted her; her father was selling her.

As Ross felt the ecstasy of the wine in his head, he again tried to visualize that strange flower—and for the first time succeeded. It was a girl's face!

His quest had now materialized out of a thin, mythical substance into a thrilling reality. It had materialized into the splendid and age-old drama of a man fighting to save a woman.

Then there was Grimsby—

But that would come later.

## XII

BACK in the heart of Pangal another white man was becoming enlightened concerning the nature of Ross's strange quest. That man was Grimsby Sahib.

Somewhere about the time when Ross discovered that he was to go after the very booty upon which Grimsby had set his own heart, the latter arrived at a very definite conclusion—either he or Gregory Ross must die.

It so happened that shortly after the hour when the sun is at a sufficient height to drive all white men into their bungalows, Grimsby received an unusual visitor. It was a native who had come from the city by a somewhat circuitous route—a route which had taken him through the topes and wooded portions of the country, instead of along the cart road that led up to Grimsby's cliff. He entered the compound from the darkness of the thicket on the jungle side, and walked—or, rather, sneaked—past the godowns and the servants' lines to the rear of the bungalow.

His rag-soled sandals made no patter on the soft dust, nor did the umbrella he was carrying strike against any of the overhanging palm branches or tamarind boughs. He appeared before Grimsby Sahib as if rising out of the papyrus mat and the chunamed bricks of the floor.

Grimsby lay with his legs sprawled on each arm of his grasshopper chair. He was smoking clouds of tobacco to keep off the flying ants, and sipping a tall, tinkling glass of gin and soda. His tremendous soiled figure seemed made of brown sugar that was slowly losing all form of humanity and melting into the rattan bottom of the chair.

"Holy cripes! What the 'ell? Who's you, to be crawlin' into my house? Who's you, I'd like to know, to come in without no matey announcin' your business?"

Who's—" He stopped. "Well, I remember you now," he said.

The intruder was a small, fat gentleman with silver-rimmed spectacles and a yellow caste mark on his forehead. Grimsby recognized him as one of the Gaekwar's writer baboos—the very translator who had remained in the same room with Ross and the old king the day before.

"H-m! So your salary's on the make, is it? So you've come for a go with ole Grimsby, 'ave you? A bit of dustoorie—that's *your* game, I can see, while you're scratchin' them yellow palms of yours!" He chuckled, his melted shoulders seeming to congeal again into a more determined shape. "No—don't salaam me to death. I'm sick of it. Don't crawl on yer belly. I'm sick of that, too. Can't crawl very far on a belly of *that* size! Come, now, my yellow-skinned, yellow-livered son of two pigs—what's your game?"

"Sahib!" The fellow was out of breath, trying to salaam and to double up that huge paunch. "Sahib, twice-born—"

"I ain't twice-born, and I ain't no 'cherisher of the poor, and I ain't no heaven-born, neither. I'm Grimsby—that's what! And you're a hawkah comin' here for to sell me some goods. Am I right?"

"I—a hawkah, sahib? A merchant?" the high-caste baboo cried in amazement.

"Damned if you ain't! You've come to sell me somethin', ain't you? Well, don't that make you a hawkah? High-caste—pah!"

The man stood trembling, sweating profusely from his long surreptitious walk from the city.

"Sahib, whatever you say is just. I am what I am, but it matters not. Already you have divined my mission. You know I am come with certain valuable—"

"Yes—there you 'ave it! 'Valuable'—that's the word, all right. How valuable, hey? How many rupees? Let's have no hanky-panky about your comin' here—sneakin' in—like as not through the doob grass, judgin' from your clothes. You translated that there conversation the white man had with the Gaekwar—that much I know. They made remarks which you think I'd ought to hear—for a consideration. All right—out with it!"

The baboo held out a pudgy yellow hand, palm upward. Grimsby roared, a foul gush of oaths coming out of his throat so that the betel juice seemed to foam at his mouth.

He jumped from his chair, giving the impression of a flabby, motionless toad suddenly galvanized into violent action.

The baboo fell backward, cringing against the wall as if his fat tender body were being lashed with a whip. In the height of his misery he was conscious of a merry jingle of rupees rolling at his feet—bright new ones, with the empress's head flashing and twinkling. The writer baboo was himself again.

"There you are, you lickspittle nark! Pick it up! Grab it! Ten rupees—there's your dustoorie. Now what's what?"

The baboo wiped his spectacles, which had been misted with the sweat of his brow.

"It concerns the white man from the sea, who made a compact with you, my revered and twice-born—"

"Out with it! What's what, I asked you? Leave off jinglin' them rupees! Leave off shufflin' your spats! Stand still, and out with it!"

"He has broken his compact—"

"He has, has he?" the other bellowed.

"Oh, no! Don't you think it! No one never broke a compact with ole Grimsby. I sent him off to the jungle yesterday. You ain't seen him since."

"Not since then, sahib; but I know wherefore he went into the jungle."

"So do I, but I ain't tellin' *you*. Anythink I tells you, you'll bung the word to the old Gaekwar. I know you natives! You ain't gettin' nothink out of me, my black stink—not you!"

"I have not seen the white man since the conversation I translated between himself and the Gaekwar; but in that conversation it transpired that you were betrayed."

"I was, was I? Well, we'll see about that! He's off to the mountains on a little errand for the Gaekwar. If he fails to come back, there'll be a Parsee funeral, with vultures and such gorgin' theirselves!"

"But I have not yet told you the manner of your betrayal." The baboo held out his hand. "The words come hard, oh, twice-born son of—"

The same scene was repeated—Grimsby exploding into a hurricane of foul oaths, rushing upon the fat baboo, clutching his soft neck, and hurling him through a bamboo chick screen. For a moment the native lay sprawled, dazed, ruffled out of all semblance of human shape. Again came the jingle of rupees hurled at him, striking him on the chest, the forehead, the mouth.

Again the baboo was himself, wiping his glasses, adjusting his oily hair, his little cap, his embroidered jacket.

"May the gods bless you and your seed for generations!" he cried fervently; but, catching the white man's eye, he hurried on. "It concerns the daughter of a certain Béraud Sahib, planter of indigo."

This indeed struck a qualm in Grimsby's chest. He stood back, his betel-stained mouth partially open.

"What the 'ell? Who's been narkin' about my business, I'd like to know? Who's been—" He made an attempt to calm himself—and succeeded. "Yes, mebbe so—the daughter of the Frenchman. What about it?"

"I, Djola Mahat, son of two swine, am cognizant of the fact that you have for some years past contemplated abducting this woman, the daughter of the planter."

"I made no bones about it. They're sellin' her off to a half-breed who's got some of your black blood in his lousy carcass—but there, what of it? What am I makin' explanations to *you* for? That ain't your business; but I'll tell you this—I'll get her now or later, and let all Pangal know it!"

"This white man from the sea," the baboo said, dropping his voice, "is on his way to the plantation, to abduct her."

"God!" the other burst out wildly. "If I ever finds out who's been narkin'!" He turned again on the wretched baboo, whose hams began to tremble like jelly. "All right! You little stink of butter! All right! If you know that, you know it, and there's an end to it! He's on the way now! Who's you, that Grimsby should be afraid and hem and haw, and lie to you, and deny to you? Who's you, I'd like to know? Little bloated tick—that's what!"

The little bloated tick seemed to swell now to his utmost proportions. He smiled—actually smiled, showing perfect white teeth and effeminate curling lips. He looked over the thick silver rims of his spectacles with knowing, twinkling eyes. Finally he purred:

"Understand, sir, that the young white man is abducting the girl, not for you, but for the—shall I say it?—for the Gaekwar. He made pretense, perhaps, to you—as you yourself have confided to me—that he was going to get the damsel for you, and thus he made use of your help, your protection, your ammunition, your shikari; but the truth is—"

The baboo realized that he had fulfilled his object. No further words were necessary—or safe. He slunk off, keeping his eye upon the purpling jowls of Grimsby, and his back to the nearest door.

Grimsby was reaching for a pistol. He had incorporated many oriental customs in his morality, one of which was that peculiar habit, honored by centuries and kings, of killing the bearer of evil tidings.

But the baboo, waddling and fat though he was, had fled like a scared pig. Nothing was left of him except a scent of aloes and myrrh, and, on the lower veranda, a rag-soled slipper.

In less than half an hour after his departure, Grimsby Sahib was mounted on a tat pony, with a cartridge belt about his huge waist, and a gun strapped to the cantle of his saddle, in a carbine boot. Followed by three native horsemen, and by two pack horses carrying his tent, water, and provisions, he started out for the jungle.

Both Grimsby and Ross had come to a conclusion at almost the same time. A conflict had developed between them—a conflict that could be settled only by the death of the one or the other.

### XIII

ON the eastern slope of the Ghats, a series of heavily timbered hills descended in precipitous steps toward an interminable simmering plain. The central plain of India, once you crossed that divide, was a blast furnace of heat, hemmed in by both the Western and Eastern Ghats from the winds of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal.

It was on this down slope of the mountains that the plantation of Béraud, the Frenchman, was situated. The site was more advantageous for the growing of indigo than for the health of a white man.

The plantation, the steeping vats, the godowns in which he stored his indigo, the tumble-down road over which his bullock carts took the morning supply of leaves, were situated just above the hot belt of the plains; but the site was not as high as the clearer, healthier air of the hills. The hill stations of India are just above the so-called malarial belt. Not so with the plantation of Béraud Sahib.

Jules Béraud, in fact, gave evidence of having lived for a good part of his life in a damp, hot climate. He seemed at once



dried up and soggy—an extraordinary combination. His skin was like an old yellow doughnut that has been dipped in milk. His eyes were cavernous, but brightened by their red rims, owing to his addiction to *hasheesh*. His lips were ghastly, the upper one dirtied with a sooty mustache.

As he walked from his storehouses back to the bungalow, that morning, Béraud swung the bamboo cane which he customarily used on the backs of his lazy coolies. Pacing along the ride through his compound, he flicked nervously at the flowers on either hand, cutting them off with vicious oaths, as if he were beheading human beings.

The particular human being whom he was thus whipping in effigy was his daughter. She had revolted. He, a French father, had arranged a marriage for her—a marriage that was to make him a rich man, that was to build up his mortgaged plantation, that was to give him an allowance which he could gamble away in Pondicherry to his heart's content, that was to give him a princely household, with a dozen black wives instead of two. All these delights were denied to him because his daughter—a willful, thankless little *cocotte*—objected to marrying a man merely because he had a slight touch of the tar brush in his blood!

Jules Béraud whipped at the flowers, picked them up, crushed them, sniffed at the released perfume. He gave the impression of a woman overcome with emotion, insulted, pale with anger, sniffing at her smelling salts.

"I will crush her! I will break her spirit! I will imprison her! I will starve her! I will beat her!" he cried, thinking in his own peculiar language, a mixture of English, French, and Hindustani.

Firmly intent on carrying out these threats to the letter, he hurried to his bungalow, where for several days past he had kept his daughter imprisoned in a cell-like apartment with walls two feet thick.

The bungalow was surprisingly clean for the habitation of such a man as Jules Béraud. Its neatness, however, was obviously due to a feminine touch. Run down as it was, with torn chits, ant-eaten rafters, books that were half destroyed by termites, the place was not unlovely. There were flowers in every vase—all withered now, however, for the daughter of the house had not been able to renew them. There was

a violin on the drawing-room table which the girl played—and which Béraud himself attempted to play when sufficiently intoxicated. He was fond of music, of flowers, of women, of perfume, of *hasheesh*, and of cognac.

The servants knew that morning that a crisis was at hand. They had learned—through the gossip of Béraud's two native consorts, who were kept in a *zenana* of their own, but who knew everything—that *mademoiselle* had refused to accept the husband assigned to her by her father. This was a situation almost impossible to state in the native vocabulary, and utterly impossible to understand.

The servants, nevertheless, comprehended the fact that the girl was to be severely punished, that she had been imprisoned, as one imprisons thieves in the jail *khanna*. They knew that the master's compact with a rich East Indian manganese merchant was jeopardized, for no reason whatever except that the girl had objected to marrying a half-breed. That part the servants understood, and in a measure forgave; but for her to go against her father's will was unpardonable.

What took place behind those thick, rain-stained walls in the dark room beyond no one knew. No one, in fact, dared guess. Their master was trembling with rage when he entered—so said the *chuprassy* who carried the oil lamp.

The master went in and closed the door behind him. The *chuprassy* listened at the huge lock. He looked through the keyhole, but the place was lighted only with a wick placed in a dish of vegetable oil—dim, smoking. The exquisite Jules Béraud hated the smell of kerosene, and clung to Indian customs in the way of lighting as well as of living.

There were screams—there was wailing on the part of Béraud as well as his unfortunate daughter. Béraud, so the spying *chuprassy* affirmed, was alternately weeping and flying into passions of anger. The forms of the two could be seen like dim shadows cast by the small lamp, enacting a dreadful tragedy against the old stained wall.

The girl was thrown to her knees. No, she did not beg. She was proud; she was fierce; her black eyes glowered like a cheetah's beneath a mane of tangled hair. Then there was the bamboo whip. The *chuprassy* fled.

He fled as far as the veranda, where there were other servants—the girl's ayah, wailing and beating her breast, the high-caste cook, the matey, the grass cutters, the punkah wallahs. The soulless beast had prohibited his punkah wallahs from fanning the girl during her three days' imprisonment!

And there was one other person on the veranda—a guest. He was a jungly-looking individual—the sort of creature whom the natives fail to salaam, fail to call sahib. He looked like some ragged British private who had escaped from the cantonment and hidden in the forest until hunger and fever had driven him back to civilization.

He carried a cartridge belt about his waist, and a big pistol—the kind with which hunters protect themselves from elephant herds. The chuprassy looked at him and realized that for all his rags, his boots filled with grass, his cheeks cut with thorns, his clothes stained with vines and jheel ooze, the fellow had a certain air.

The chuprassy salaamed humbly. He also cried, with a mingling of respect and terror:

"Sahib and twice-born, may the jungle gods be thanked for sending you to this house!"

#### XIV

THE high-caste cook and the lesser menials were as greatly impressed as the chuprassy with the imposing stature, the keen gray eyes, the fierce and unshaven chin of this desperado of the jungle. He was salaamed to, he was called sahib, he was admitted without question.

"He is some sort of jungle sahib—a magistrate himself, probably," the grass cutter whispered to the chuprassy. "He came followed by an elephant, with a venerable old mahout, and a shikari riding before him—a very strange troupe. And that dhole dog—it will rend us to pieces if we attempt to dismiss this man from the compound!"

The chuprassy had no intention whatsoever of sending the man from the compound; but he found himself in a delicate situation. Here was this desperate-looking customer from the jungle on the one hand, and on the other the master of the house in a fit of maniacal fury. The chuprassy could only mutter:

"Sir, this house—of which I am butler—it is the house of Béraud Sahib."

"I do not wish to see Béraud Sahib," the jungle man announced coolly. The

servants all breathed freely again. "I have come to see his daughter," he added.

The chuprassy turned yellow. The old ayah screamed and threw up her hands. The high-caste cook backed away against the wall, as if he were to be defiled for seven generations by the shadow of this carrier sahib. The grass cutters slunk away, and watched from behind pillars.

Finally the chuprassy was able to stammer out:

"The mem-sahib is engaged. I cannot tell, sir, at what she is engaged, but this I know—I myself do not dare summon her. If you give me your card, sahib, I might thrust it across the threshold of her door."

The other laughed.

"What would I be doing with a card out there in the scrub jungle?"

"Then I dare not go in, sahib, unless perhaps you can give me your name. In that case I might call through the door. Your name, sahib?"

"That is not necessary."

"But what will my master say?"

"I do not want to see your master. I want to see the mem-sahib."

Again the servants cringed. The white man was probably drunk. A drunken white man had always proved impossible to deal with. The white-haired ayah wailed out prayers to the gods that they would save her beloved charge from these demon white men. The grass cutters and punkah wallahs slunk still farther off.

"Who are you, sahib?" the chuprassy cried desperately. "I am afraid to go in there. I cannot summon them. I cannot explain. If you have no name, have you no means of identification? Are you an I. C. S. wallah come to inspect this household? Are you a police magistrate who wishes to—"

"Identification?" the young man said. "Yes—since you refuse to bring the lady of the house here, perhaps this will change your mind."

He pulled out the two threads that hung tucked into his breast. At the end he showed a little idol carved out of stone—a head with radiating hands. The high-caste cook uttered a scream, as if some one had stuck him in the back. The grass cutters and punkah wallahs vanished with arms upraised in supplication to their gods. Excited exclamations were vented, the only word of which the white man could understand was "Pangal."

"I will call my master, sahib! I will bow down to your wish as the gunda bows his head to the goad of the mahout, as the bullock bows to the kicks of its master, as the rice bows to the voice of the monsoon!"

The young white man, who was Gregory Ross, looked about the veranda at the stained walls, the ragged chits, the faded flowers, the ant-eaten French books, the warped teapoys.

He did not wait long. The chuprassy, it seemed, lost no time in calling his master to deal with the situation. Ross found himself staring now at a lizard whose every scale flashed like copper as it scurried across a band of sunlight, now at a long thread of ants traveling in single file across the veranda, now at a parrot muttering and whistling to the dhole dog, and now at a ghastly little man who had come cautiously, silently, out of the bungalow like a ghost.

"Is this Jules Béraud?"

"It is, *m'sieu'*—and who are you, may I ask, that you come so importunately on my premises without announcing yourself?"

"You will know who I am. It's no secret, but the fact is it's little business of yours!"

"Then, *m'sieu'*, I see no other course for myself but to ask you peremptorily to leave this compound. No? Then, if I should get a gun—I will get a gun! I will shoot you down for a robber! I—"

The suddenness of his pause was so apparent that Ross stared in wonder. The Frenchman had paled—a process which left his face more ghastly than ever. He had caught sight of the dhole dog.

"*M'sieu'*, that dog—" he said, and paused again.

"Yes—it is mine. Not a very agreeable specimen," Ross said.

The Frenchman's voice immediately changed to a whine.

"The surgeon major, *m'sieu'*, has prohibited dogs in this municipality, because of rabies."

"The dog stays until my business is complete."

"I entreat you, *m'sieu'*, what is your business?"

"My business concerns not you, M. Béraud, but your daughter."

The other's lip trembled. He reached for the back of a veranda chair.

"My daughter!" he exclaimed.

The stranger was crazy—that was the only way to explain it. He was a hunter

from the jungle who had been touched with the swamp fever. If it hadn't been for that hideous dog, which was crouched with bared fangs and pale eyes, as if ready to spring, Béraud would have ordered his servants to throw the man out of the compound. With the beast there, the situation demanded careful and diplomatic treatment.

"I must beg you, *m'sieu'*, to leave. I have no time—"

"I don't care for your time. Where is your daughter? I came from Pangal to see her."

"*M'sieu'*, are you mad? In this country we do not present our daughters to any man who comes out of the jungle, or from the robber hordes of Pangal. *Dustoor nahin hai*, as they say—it is not the custom."

"But it is the custom to give her in marriage to any half-breed who has money enough to buy her," Ross said quietly.

The other's face turned hot, a moisture coming over the white features.

"You say you have not come to do business with me? A lie! That is my business. If you bring that up, then you are to deal with me!"

He straightened to his full height, which, however, was scarcely enough to bring his forehead on a level with the jungle man's chin. His red eyes narrowed venomously.

"Get me a gun!" he called out to his chuprassy, who had been hiding behind one of the stained cement pillars of the veranda. "Get me my revolver from the upper drawer of my almirah. Load it. Bring it to me!"

"Before I kill you," Ross retorted smilingly, "I will tell you what you are—a miserable drug-sodden heathen, worse than a black man! They tell me that you beat your daughter, that you are going to sell her to a half-breed who beat his last wife!"

Jules Béraud wiped his forehead, looked about at the chairs, the teapoys, the table at the end of the veranda, with the vain hope that some weapon might come to his hand with which to deal with this crazed man.

"I have been given to understand," Ross went on, "that this East Indian to whom you have promised your daughter beat his last wife to death, and it was only his enormous wealth and a good lot of *dustoorie* that got him off. Now you are selling your girl to him. That's your business, is it? Yes, I am dealing with you! I will give you one bargain and one bargain only—



your daughter comes out here to meet me, or else your house will be torn down about your ears, and you will come back through the jungle with me as far as Pangal."

The other reached for a teapoy, not for a weapon—there were no weapons at hand, but there was a bottle. It looked as if he were going to throw it at the head of the tall, unshaven bandit standing before him, but he thought better of it. Instead, he took a swig of cognac from the bottle's neck, set it back, and threw himself into a chair.

"*M'sieu*," he said, in a different voice, "I am a weak man. I am sick. I am broken. It has broken me—the life of India. It has taken away my health." His face puckered up. His voice came in sobs. "*M'sieu*, I beg of you, leave me to my misery! You are strong. I cannot fight with you. I am a miserable man, *m'sieu*!"

"Can you hope for mercy at my hands, M. Béraud—I who am from Pangal?"

The other uttered a cry at hearing this dreaded word. He looked up into the grim, unshaven face again, and flinched under the stare of those fierce gray eyes.

"My daughter, *m'sieu*, is to be happy, I beg you to understand. I am a poor man. My place is mortgaged. Misfortune at cards has divested me of everything. This man who is her betrothed is a rich man, *m'sieu*. She will have horses, carriages, servants, jewels, bungalows in the hills, on the plains, in Madras."

"And so will you, I take it," Ross interrupted. "You are selling her—that is the only way to put it—and against her will."

"Before God, no, *m'sieu*! She has acquiesced only this very hour. She is happy at the arrangement."

"A lie! My shikari has heard strange tales of your cruelty from the natives on the jungle rim. They would be unbelievable, except that we know you are a drug addict. Come, now—your daughter!"

Jules Béraud jumped up with a desperate and almost maniacal fit of anger.

"You call me the liar! You call me the drug addict! You call me this and that! It shall not be! I will hear no longer! Kill me now if you wish! I refuse! I am unarmed—kill me!"

Ross made a movement with his pistol. The other fell to his knees, suddenly whimpering, crying.

"No, no, *m'sieu*, you will not kill me in cold blood! What are you—a brigand and

murderer?" He gasped. "I have heard of a man over there—they call him Grimsby—but it is not known whether he is the leader of this Pangal gang or not. The British will soon go to get him. My God, *m'sieu*, are you—"

"I am not Grimsby, or I would not judge as I am judging you," Ross snapped. "Get up on your feet!"

The other refused. Ross put two fingers into his mouth and whistled. From out of the hedge beyond the veranda there appeared a tall, ragged-looking Hindu with grizzly beard and tiny, glittering eyes.

"I am going inside to get the girl. I shall not come out without her. Keep this man on his knees until I return. Let the elephant be here at the steps, kneeling, when I come out."

The shikari salaamed. The Frenchman gibbered, wailed, groveled on the papyrus mat, clung to Ross's legs.

"*M'sieu*, you are taking from me all that I possess—the daughter that I love, that I reared from babyhood—a motherless child who is worth—"

"Who is worth quite a little money," Ross put in hotly.

"What are you going to do?" Béraud cried desperately. "For what is the elephant? Is it possible that—"

"Yes—I am going to save your daughter from you and from your despicable tyranny. She shall not be sold to a half-breed, even if I have to make her prisoner!"

"What? *Mon Dieu*!" the other cried. "Abduct her? Steal from me all that I possess?" he screeched, beating his breast.

He wailed like a dog that is being whipped. He crawled forward, his face a pitiable, ghastly index of suffering and rage, until his eye fell upon something that miraculously changed his whole expression.

His voice dropped dead still. He stiffened where he was, on his hands and knees, giving the exact impression of a cat that has caught sight of something like a mouse—something that is small, that is precious, that has to be stalked with infinite care. Like a cat he waited, taut, biding his time. He gave further pretense of weeping and crying, so that Ross would not suspect. There on the mat lay the revolver for which he had sent his chuprassy some moments before.

The chuprassy had taken an unconscionably long time finding that weapon, loading it, and returning to give it to his master.

He had been sent on an errand that was not to his liking. What might not that brigand from the jungle do to him when he returned?

The native took his time. He even went so far as to look down the barrel of the revolver, to see if it was clean. Finding that it was not, he had killed a little more time by cleaning it with the ramrod and gun cotton that he found in the same drawer. Then he had loaded it and had silently, fearfully, returned to the door that led out on the veranda.

Here his nerve had totally failed him. To go out there and present a gun to his master, while that unshaven, belligerent man was on the same veranda, took a courage that few natives possessed. Instead, he knelt down behind the rattan chit, and listened with fear and trembling. Waiting until the formidable stranger's back was turned, he slid the weapon through the bottom of the rattan screen, so that it dropped noiselessly within a few feet of his master.

Ross, meanwhile, threw off the Frenchman, who had been clinging to him with the desperation of a drowning man. Disregarding the fellow's hysteria—and his sudden equanimity—the man from Pangal hastened into the bungalow. The business he had in hand must be attended to, not with words, but with deeds of dispatch.

## XV

ENTERING the bungalow through the veranda door, the invader almost stumbled over the form of the servant crouching there. The latter howled, like a cat whose tail is stepped on. Ross immediately took him by the scruff of the neck, hauled him to his feet, and shouted:

"Where is the mem-sahib's room?"

The servant looked up into the unshaven, ferocious jaw of the big white man. No chance for any equivocation now! No chance even to think up excuses! The native's inveterate preference for lying, instead of telling the truth, was useless in this crisis.

He led the way to *mademoiselle's* room. She was doomed—there was no doubt about that. The master was outside, under guard of a bearded hillman; the other servants had fled; the compound itself was commanded by another robber mounted on an elephant.

Yes, the beautiful young mem-sahib was doomed! The master was cursed in having

a daughter, anyway—so thought the Hindu servant. A daughter lost is not a misfortune, but rather a blessing. Besides, the tall white man from the jungle was behind him, following like an avenging mahoo; and that settled it.

The door was unbolted from the outside. Béraud, apparently, had been so much upset that he had neglected to lock it when he was summoned to meet his strange guest.

Inside was the young mem-sahib.

She was a peculiar-looking being. Ross had a feeling that his eyes were tricking him in the dusty beams of the little lamp. She sat on the edge of a cot, with a vast amount of mosquito netting behind her reaching almost to the ceiling, like the drapery of a theatrical stage. Her hair was an intense shadow against this cloud of white.

The flame of the lamp cast numberless fleeting shadows across her face, like the rippling shadows on water, which give the visual counterpart of rhythm. The changes of her expression were numberless—fear, horror, astonishment, misbelief, hysteria, ferocity.

She caught a glimpse of her father's servant, trembling in every muscle of his flabby person, his lips blue, his mouth agape, his eyes wildly proclaiming the coming of some strange terror to that doomed house. She caught a glimpse of a huge dog showing his fangs. In the doorway stood a tall figure with a pith helmet brushing the cobwebs of the arch above—an unshaven, ragged-looking man, with whites torn and stained by jungle grass, with a cartridge belt about his waist and a huge pistol in his hand.

The brigand seemed to stand there for an eternity of moments. He looked at her as if bewildered, incapable of action.

Ross wanted to make sure, first, that he had broken into the right room. He had not pictured a girl of exactly this type. There had never been in his memory a woman so utterly helpless and forlorn. He had never heard of such a situation, except perhaps back in childhood—some story about a knight going into a cave where a woman was chained. This place was a cave, if ever there was one—damp, dark, lit only by a smoky, torchlike flame, and tenanted by a wild-eyed creature with disheveled hair.

All this flood of emotion came in the first glance the two had of each other. It

seemed interminable, but in reality it was not the full span of a minute.

Ross entered the room, getting out of the bewilderment into which the sight of the girl had thrown him. He stepped toward her. She screamed, pressed back into the netting, and raised her bare olive-skinned arms, beating futilely in a tangle of mosquito curtains, as she tried to leap back from him. She could not have been more like a helpless bird caught in a net.

He took her in his arms, pressing his palm against her mouth to stop her screams. He pressed so hard, with the heel of his hand against her chin and his fingers holding her cheeks, that she could not bite him—a maneuver which she tried her best to effect.

A moment of futile struggling, and she felt herself borne out of that hot, close room, thick with air that no punkah had swept away. She found herself borne out through the dining room out to the veranda, where the hot but fresher atmosphere of the day smote her wet forehead.

What was going to happen she did not know. She remembered hearing tales of men who had been carried off into the jungle by tigers. This, in her daze, she thought was happening to her. She also remembered how a man who had been saved from a tiger said that he felt no fear while being carried off, and no pain. At such a terrible moment the brain was numbed; and so it was with the daughter of Jules Béraud.

She remembered one terrifying vision—a tall, gaunt Hindu with a frizzly beard swinging the butt of his gun at her father, who had a revolver in his hand. It happened just as the white man who was carrying her took her out on the veranda. Her father was there, and he had picked up the revolver that the chuprassy had brought him. He had fired—the line of colorless light was indelible in the girl's eyes, but the report seemed strangely far away.

The tall, gaunt Hindu, at whom he had aimed, had caught him with the butt end of his gun just in time. It crashed against the side of the Frenchman's head, sending him reeling, senseless, to the veranda floor.

She remembered, then, being lifted into a bamboo howdah on the back of an elephant. The man—or the tiger—who had captured her, leaped up into the howdah to keep her prisoner. The black man who had felled her father mounted his horse and led the way into the jungle.

The elephant rose from its kneeling posture, bearing her upward, so that she swung there like a bird sitting in its nest on a tamarind bough.

## XVI

JULES BÉRAUD opened his eyes. He was lying upon the papyrus mat and gazing at a huge blue fly that circled above him. It reminded him of the vultures that circled about the Parsee funeral towers. It came closer, wheeling above him, with a loud whizzing sound, which kept time to the murderous throb in his head.

As Béraud's vision began to take in something else besides the thatched veranda roof and the huge circling fly, he saw the forms of his servants standing about him—the high-caste cook, the grass cutter for his horse, the chuprassy, and the ayah who for many years had been nurse to his daughter.

Yes—his daughter!

What unspeakable calamity had come to pass? What had he lost? What could he say to the man to whom she was betrothed?

He had lost a priceless possession—his daughter, and something dearer to him than that—a life of luxury, of indulgence, of satisfying vice. All had been swept from him with one stroke. A tiger had come out of the jungle—that was the only way to describe it. A tiger had come, numbing every one's wits, carrying off the only booty that was worth a copper pice in the whole plantation!

His stupor left him. He scrambled to his feet, wiping his blood-dripping cheek, reeling, staring about at the servants.

The men backed away fearfully, but the white-haired ayah beat her breasts and wailed. Then Jules Béraud burst out with a throat-wrenching cry. He was like *Shylock* tearing himself into a passion over his lost daughter—and more particularly over the jewels and ducats that the loss of her entailed.

"The district police!" he yelled. "Go for the police, swine that you are! Saddle my horse! I myself will get the magistrate. A woman is abducted! The whole country will come to my aid. I will get her back! *Ma fille*—she shall not escape me! I will scour the jungle for her—yes, with a regiment! *Ma fille*—a white woman! Every white man in the municipality will come to my aid, and we will tear the brigand limb from limb!"

His horse was brought down the com-



pound on a run. He turned to his trembling servants.

"Away with you, swine and lice that you are! The police! The magistrate! Summon shikaris to lead us in the jungle! Let them blow the whistle at the jail khanna, as they do when criminals escape! Murder! The horror! The rapine! The ravishment! *Mon Dieu*, I will burn down the jungle before I lose her! Go in every direction! Summon the police, the soldiers, the justice! The death for this outrage!"

The scrub jungle in the hills above Béraud's plantation was a wilderness of matted vegetation broken by precipices of naked granite and open spaces of doob grass. This otherwise impassable stretch of country was crossed and crisscrossed by a network of hard-packed elephant trails.

If he had the means of fighting the fever, getting water and food, and protecting himself from the elephant herds, a man could hide in that jungle from any amount of pursuers. To hunt him down would be like trying to catch a water beetle in a rice paddy.

Ross knew this. He was fleeing before the veritable army recruited by the district police, and he knew that for a while, at least, he was safe with his booty. Pursuers, police, hunters, jungle beaters, sowars, were all helpless so long as the man they hunted remained up there in the mountains.

They were all helpless except one, who also pursued. There was one paddy bird who knew where to find the beetles in the rice.

Grimsby Sahib had come over the mountains. A day late in starting, he had reached the jungle rim that marks the line between civilization and Pangal at just about the time when the Frenchman had organized his pursuit.

From the edge of a great precipice Grimsby looked down upon the plains. Far off, where the irrigation wells and rice paddies marked the beginning of civilization, he could see a troop of horsemen—a thin line, like ants, crawling up the zigzag road. Beyond them, the flat plains, the villages, the mud channels, the cantonment, all lay in a stratum of undulating heat. Far off there, where the British Raj held sway, the jail khanna's whistle was blowing interminably—like a woman screaming because her child has been stolen.

Grimsby chuckled to one of his native gunbearers:

"I guess that 'll keep the young clod in the jungle for a while, until I settle my score with him! Thought he'd double-cross ole Grimsby, did he? Not him!"

He scanned the whole limitless panorama, studying every portion of it with his keen little eyes.

"I'll be blowed if the Frenchman ain't got the military after the thief! There's a platoon of horsemen down there, or I'm a bloomin' liar! That's what comes of takin' liberties with a lydy—ain't it, now? You can kill a couple o' clerk baboos, and rifle a bank, and nothin' happens; but you steal a fool girl, and the whole of India gets the monkeys over it!"

He strained his eyes, shading them against that glaring expanse of heat. He eagerly scanned the clearings in the nearer foothills. Presently he saw what looked like two ants, a little yellow termite, and a beetle.

"That's him, all right!" he cried, unable to hide his triumph. "Knew the shikari would bring him up that khor!"

The little yellow termite was Ross's dog, the two red ants were the horses, the beetle was the elephant on which Ross and the girl were riding. The paddy bird had found his prey!

"A good shikari, too! Crossed the river the fust thing! That 'll cut off a bunch of them chasin' him. Too many drowned fordin' that river—can't ford it nowhere after the rains; but there's that blowzy elephant. He'll ford anything, that runt! Yes, s'help me, they're goin' to come right into my open arms!"

This, from all appearances, was unquestionably the truth.

Down there in the malarial belt Ross was plunging madly on, his shikari leading him into a jungle retreat which, the native affirmed, would be safe from the pursuing horde. No one from the civilized side of the Ghats knew of this retreat. It was hidden away deeply in the dark, matted jungle. It was from this base, known only to Grimsby and his shikaris, that the thieves from Pangal sallied forth in their marauding expeditions.

To this point Grimsby was headed. To this point Grimsby's shikari, who was acting as Ross's guide, was taking Ross and the daughter of Jules Béraud.

(To be continued in the July number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

# On 'Lac Perdu

## HOW A MAD STRANGER PUZZLED AND SURPRISED THE VILLAGE OF BEAU RIVAGE

By Alan Sullivan

HE was a big Englishman, with broad, sloping shoulders and a short tawny beard, who got off the boat with a pile of luggage. Jacquot Roubidoux was sitting under a maple near the wharf, carving a small paddle for the youthful Jacques. He watched the proceedings with interest, for few Englishmen came this way.

It was the weekly boat from St. Étienne, and, with the exception of Philippe, Jacquot's father-in-law, the Englishman was the only passenger. There was a mountain of luggage, mostly small leather-strapped trunks, and two flat boxes that looked as if they might contain the kind of gun that broke in two. Jacquot wondered what on earth a man would do with so much stuff in a country like this.

The stranger looked around with a sort of half smile, and saw the motionless figure under the maple. He came over with a long, lounging step.

"I would like to go up the river. Can you take me?"

He spoke in French, which was very clear and crisp, and sounded as if it was just out of a book. Jacquot found it a little difficult. Looking into the stranger's face, he wondered whether the man's eyes were blue or gray.

"Yes, *m'sieu'*, I can take you—but where?"

The Englishman gave a laugh that sounded a little hard.

"That does not matter. When can you start?"

Jacquot glanced at the luggage.

"Does *m'sieu'* desire to take all that? And how far does one go?"

"Yes, all that, and one goes till I decide to stop—the farther the better."

"It is a matter of at least two canoes, and it may be three."

"Get them," said the stranger.

"And the provisions, *m'sieu'*, for how long a time? One must know that. When do you return?"

"I do not return," said this remarkable person.

Lighting his pipe, he strolled off along the trail that leads up the river.

Jacquot scratched his head and repaired to the general store of Gaston Leblanc, where one may buy anything from a bedstead to a pound of raisins. Gaston listened attentively.

"Without doubt he is mad," observed the storekeeper; "and, like all the mad English, he is rich. It must be that you take another canoe to carry the food; but do you yourself not return, either?"

Jacquot glanced at the maple leaves, which were just beginning to show patches of scarlet.

"Most certainly, and before the ice is too thick. It will be a matter of food for six men for five weeks, and for another one what the canoe will carry. Let there be enough tobacco, of course."

## II

At three o'clock, when Jacquot reported that all was ready, the Englishman got into the bow of the leading canoe without a word. The minute he picked up a paddle, Jacquot knew that he had done this sort of thing before. That was something of a comfort.

He asked no questions as to the provisions, how much they had, or of what kind, or what the river and the portages were like, or the fishing, or the game. All he seemed to care about was that they should get upstream and out of sight as soon as possible.

He paddled with a smooth, strong, easy

stroke, but every now and then he would forget to paddle, and appeared content to sit still and feel the canoe thrust forward under Jacquot's quick, muscular swing. Once and again he hummed a sad little song about his taking one road and some one else taking another, and his getting somewhere first and never seeing his true love any more. The song gave Jacquot a queer feeling in his throat.

It was on the second evening, while he sat smoking on the shore—close by the run of the water, at which he had been staring for a long time—that he crooked a finger at Jacquot, who, knocking the ashes out of his own pipe, came forward.

"This river," he said quietly. "What is it called?"

Jacquot stared. Was it possible the man did not know? All the world knew that!

"Rivière des Rêves—the River of Dreams," he said.

"And where does it come from?"

Jacquot shrugged his shoulders.

"From the north—very far north. There is a lake up yonder in the mountains, but, myself, I have never seen it."

"What is it called?"

"Lac Perdu, *m'sieu'*."

"Lost Lake!" said *m'sieu'*, as if to himself. "That ought to do. And there is nothing there?"

"Pardon, *m'sieu'*, but there are moose and caribou, and trout of a notable size, and timber which is big and fine, but too far away for the lumberman. It is not so that there is nothing there."

The stranger smiled a little.

"Well, let us say that there is everything except one thing."

"And what is that?"

"Woman."

Jacquot shook his head.

"Of a certainty there is no woman there, nor can there be any white woman between Lac Perdu and Whale River."

"And where is Whale River?"

"It runs into the Hudson Bay, a month's journey farther north."

That seemed to please the Englishman, and he fell silent for a moment. Then he said:

"Is there anything on Lac Perdu to live in—a cabin or hut, for instance, which is not occupied?"

"There was a *cabane* there, so Jean Lacoste told me last year; but without doubt it will be in ruins by now."

"No matter! It will do."

Jacquot stared again.

"Is it that *m'sieu'* proposes to spend the winter on Lac Perdu, and alone?"

"It is well for every man to spend a winter alone now and then. Why do you stare?"

Jacquot reddened under his tan.

"Pardon, *m'sieu'*, but it is of the long cold nights I was thinking, when the ice heaves and the timber wolf talks in the hills. It is not many men who care to live alone thus."

"Possibly, but it sounds like a good place where to find what I seek."

"There is no gold on Lac Perdu, *m'sieu'*. Many have sought gold in that country, and found not."

"It is not gold I seek."

From the way *m'sieu'* said this, and from an odd expression on his face, Jacquot perceived an invitation to probe further. Moreover, was not this the first conversation they had had since starting?

"If I might ask what *m'sieu'* seeks, it is possible I might help."

"I seek my soul, Jacquot! What do you suggest?"

The little Frenchman tried to look undisturbed. Undoubtedly, as Gaston Leblanc had said, the man was mad; and how could one leave a madman to spend the winter alone on Lac Perdu?

"Would it not be as well to winter nearer to the village, and go north in the spring, when it is more inviting? I myself shall return to Beau Rivage before the ice forms."

*M'sieu'* smiled.

"You are married, then?"

"I have eight children, and if the good God is kind there will be more."

"You want more?"

"Each of my brothers is the father of ten," said Jacquot, with a touch of envy.

"And what do you with so many?"

"One loves them and feeds them. What else could one do?"

*M'sieu'* glanced at him sharply.

"Obviously, nothing." He stretched his long legs. "Good night, Jacquot!"

### III

It was ten days before they reached Lac Perdu, and on the way they passed certain famous pools, where Jacquot saw fly-fishing such as he had never seen before. *M'sieu'* seemed another man then, and very much alive, when he gripped the canoe thwart



between thigh and calf and dropped his flies where he would, no matter how broken the water, with a new light in his eyes.

During those ten days Jacquot had many a talk with Pierre Lalonge, who had married the second cousin of Jacquot's half sister, and was therefore one of the family. The talk was mostly about the stranger, whose name had been scratched off each of the leather trunks. It was at the end of a long argument that Pierre found the most probable solution.

"It must be that having loved greatly, and not being loved in return, he seeks solitude. That is like the English, who in such affairs are mostly mad. A Frenchman would have found happiness elsewhere, but this patron of yours is desolated with all woman for a season or two. He will recover. The eyes of a woman, even though she be not merciful, are better than the voice of the gray wolf on Lac Perdu."

"Perhaps," said Jacquot dubiously.

"Or if it is not that, then without doubt it is that the number of his children are less than he desires. He may have only six or seven."

"No, it is not a matter of children; nor is he poor, for his money is carried in a small sack, as if it were tea, and his cigarettes in a thing of gold as long as the image of the good St. Paul in the church of Beau Rivage. It may be that he goes north to write a book which cannot be written against the sound of a woman's talk. One of the trunks is full of books. He told me that himself when I grunted with the weight of it at the first portage."

"Then, since he says that he does not return, what will happen to such things if he goes farther north in the spring?"

Jacquot lifted his shoulders.

"It may be that about that time, when the ice is clear, you and I shall journey again to Lac Perdu. It is only part of the man we have here. Where the rest of him is only the good God can say."

On the tenth day, at the end of a short portage, they reached Lac Perdu. It lay ringed with sentinel pines in a hollow of the hills, and the peaks around it were already white; but on the lower ground there was still the warm bath of sunshine that precedes the snows.

Along the shore thrust out dark green points, whose emerald arms sheltered mirrored bays where the water was like glass, and one could see the color of the stones

thirty feet down. In one of these, and close to the shore, looking south, they found the *cabane* of Jean Lacoste. The walls still stood, but the roof of cedar scoops had evidently been broken in by a bear looking for wild honey. Ground hemlock had grown up to the very door, and the trail to the water's edge was but faintly visible.

Jacquot swung the canoe so that her bows pointed straight at it, and waited. *M'sieu'* stared, but did not speak.

"It is only a ruin at present, *m'sieu'*, but five men can do much with five axes in a few days; or shall we build another *cabane* elsewhere?"

The Englishman half turned round, and took a long stare at the lake. This was what he would see from the cabin window. There was a queer expression on his face, which struck Jacquot as being like that of a boy who knows that the water is cold, and who hesitates before he makes the first plunge. Jacquot never went swimming himself, but he had noticed this look in others.

Then the stranger threw away his cigarette and reached out with his paddle.

"I stay here," he said.

#### IV

THE work was done in less than a week. Jacquot would trust none of the old roof, and split a new one. The walls were re-chinked, a new hewn floor was laid, and basswood cupboards were built, with rawhide hinges to the doors. Tables and benches were a simple matter, and from an old barrel Pierre fashioned a most comfortable chair, stuffed with meadow grass and upholstered with sacking.

Two axmen heaped up a huge woodpile close to the door, and constructed a landing place at the water's edge, where a canoe might moor with safety. Then they built a storehouse strong enough to defy any bear, and lastly—this being Jacquot's thought—a sort of arbor, with a table, where one might sit and look at the lake and write a book when the sun was warm enough.

*M'sieu'* unpacked on the last day. There were indeed many books, and papers with pictures, and guns that broke in two in the middle, and mountains of cartridges. He was very neat about all these, and stowed everything away where it ought to go. Then he began to look at the papers with the pictures of people and horses and dogs in them.

That was in the late afternoon. Jacquot was sitting outside, smoking, and surveying his work with quiet satisfaction, when he heard *m'sieu'* swear for the first time, and there came the sound of tearing paper. A moment later a round, crumpled ball flew out and rolled between two stones by the water.

There was silence inside, and, when Jacquot went in at his patron's call, the stranger's face was as usual. He held out a letter.

"When you get back, I would like this posted—not from Beau Rivage or St. Étienne, but from Quebec. You will send it there by the next man who goes. In the spring I want you or some other man to come here for me, and to travel north as far as I want to go. It had better not be a married man, for I do not know how long he will be away. And for you, my friend, my thanks, and here is your money, and as much again. You will need it if those other two children arrive. You will not answer any questions that may be asked about me. To make that easier, I have not told you my name. For the people of Beau Rivage I have no name. Do not worry about me for the next few months. If I should not be here when the man comes in the spring, there will be a letter on the table, with his pay. So *au revoir*, or perhaps *adieu*, Jacquot. It is in my mind that I shall find what I seek on Lac Perdu."

He stood on the shore, in the gray of the morning, to wave good-by. The thin, cold mist that curled about on the face of the water half shrouded his figure, and made it seem taller than ever. Then they rounded the first point, and he disappeared altogether. Yes, he was undoubtedly mad!

## V

It took four days, with the current, to get back to Beau Rivage. On the morning of the fifth day Jacquot took from his pocket a little crumpled ball of paper, and smoothed it out on the kitchen table. Jeannette was leaning over his shoulder. She was curious, and very happy. Her husband had come back with an unbelievable sum of money. But the poor *m'sieu'*! Perhaps it had not been quite right to take it from one so afflicted.

Then her mind turned to the pictures. They were mostly of horses ridden by men wearing strange clothes and tall hats, some-

thing like that worn by Father Leroux when he went once a year to the shrine of Ste. Anne de Beaupré. On the other side of the page was one picture of a woman, at which Jeannette stared with a queer instinct that she didn't understand in the least. It showed a beautiful woman, with pearls around her neck, and with black hair, in which there was a curious shining thing that looked like the *couronne* given to the Blessed Virgin by the folk of Beau Rivage when she saved the church from the big bush fire, three years before.

"Why is it," asked Jeannette, "that *m'sieu'* should cast out such a face as that?"

Jacquot was puzzled. He didn't understand women.

"It is only because he has loved in vain, the poor gentleman," said his wife. "*Mon Dieu*, but I think if all the men she has refused were to come to Lac Perdu, thy fortune would be made!"

The idea rather appealed to Jacquot. Then he told her about the letter.

"Is there one in the village who goes before long to Quebec?" he asked.

"It may be that Marthe Bienaimé goes before long, but I do not know yet. However, give it to me, and I will see."

Jacquot handed over the letter with an odd misgiving.

"The word of *m'sieu'* was that it should not be posted in Beau Rivage."

Jeannette said little more. That afternoon, when she ascertained that Marthe would not visit Quebec before the ice went out, she sat for an hour deep in thought. There could be but one reason for the strange action of the strange Englishman, and the name on the letter was the same as the one under the picture. He did not want this most beautiful lady to know where he was.

Jeannette studied the exquisite face again, and shook her head. The good God could not mean that two people who looked like this should be kept apart. The lady was of noble family, and there was no doubt as to *m'sieu'* being of equal blood.

At that, romance was reborn in Jeannette's matronly breast. She bent over the cradle that contained her youngest, and nodded with a sort of secret wisdom.

## VI

WINTER settled over the village of Beau Rivage as one might scatter a sackful of feathers. Ever deeper and thicker it came,

until the gilded Virgin who spent the whole year on the spire of the parish church looked down at a cluster of snow mounds, from each of which rose a trickle of pearly smoke, and beneath each of which the children of the parish lived in safety and comfort.

As the cold grew more intense, the mind of Jacquot traveled more frequently to Lac Perdu, and he wondered how things were going there. That winter the trapping was poor, and no man took the trail to the far north.

Jacquot was in the general store of Gaston Leblanc one evening when the weekly stage arrived from St. Étienne. Georges Deslarmes, the driver, stamped in, rubbing his hands and snapping long icicles from his shaggy mustache.

"Come and help me! There is a woman in the stage, and I think the frost has got her, for she cannot walk."

Wrapped up in the bottom of the sleigh, out where the two young Percheron horses were steaming in the snow, was a woman with a face like one dead. She murmured something as if half asleep while they lifted her. Gaston made a sign to Jacquot.

"Your wife—it is she who is needed here. This poor soul must go to bed at once and drink whisky *blanc*. The cold is at her heart!"

Jacquot ran into his own house, where things happened very quickly. The two eldest children were thrust in with the two next ones, and in a few minutes the stranger had occupied their place. Jeannette took off some of her clothes, marveled at the fineness of them, and forced whisky *blanc*, which is hot like fire, between her clenched teeth. Her slender feet were stiff as marble, but there were no patches of frostbite.

Jeannette piled on blankets and coverlets padded with wild duck feathers. Then, with an odd light in her eyes, she came back into the kitchen, where the men were now smoking.

"There is no harm done, but it was just in time. Who is this?"

Georges shook his head.

"A stranger. She came by the stage to St. Étienne."

"You have not seen her before?"

"Never."

"And where does she go from here?"

"How can one tell, and where is there to go from Beau Rivage?"

"Lac Perdu," said Jeannette, whereat the men whistled in unison.

The wind blew hard that night, but died away at sunrise, and dawn revealed the tiny village sparkling like a cluster of diamonds. Jacquot breakfasted with his family by lamplight, which is a habit in the French country in the winter time, even though there isn't much to do; and it was when the elder children had plowed off to school that a vision of beauty stood at the door.

Jacquot jumped up. He had never seen a woman like this before. Her eyes were very dark and bright, her skin very smooth and lovely. Though her face was anxious, this seemed to make her more divine than ever. She wore a dress of homespun, something like that woven in French Canada, though much finer, and around her shoulders was a cloak of what he recognized as sable. Her hands and feet were very slender, and her shoes the smallest he had ever seen. No wonder her feet were cold!

Jeannette stared, too, noting that the lady wore but one ring. Then the latter spoke in the same kind of French that *m'sieu'* had used, but more quickly than he did.

"I owe you both so many thanks that it is hard to give them. I did not know it could be so cold anywhere as this!"

"We have done nothing," said Jeannette, while Jacquot slid his pipe into his pocket.

The lady saw that, and begged that he would go on smoking. The two waited for what would come next. They knew there was something.

"You will think it very strange, but I would like to ask if you can tell me anything of a gentleman who must have been here last year at the end of summer?"

"An Englishman, *madame*?"

"Yes—tall and broad, with a small pointed beard. He spoke French, and had blue eyes, and was a great fisherman."

"And his name, *madame*?" ventured Jacquot curiously.

The lady hesitated.

"Does that matter very much? I will tell you, if I must, but I would rather not. It is not one to be ashamed of."

"Is it then so important that he should be found?"

The dark eyes grew very tender.

"So important to me—and to others—that I could not begin to tell you. There is much that depends upon his return."

"Is it permitted to ask more?" said Jacquot, who was beginning to feel a little uncomfortable.



"The happiness of many depends on it—of his mother, and—and—others. He is a man of high station."

Jeannette made a sudden gesture. She had been watching closely. If there had been something shining in the dark hair, it would have looked just like the picture that was carefully put away in the family chest, not six feet from where the visitor sat. She sent her husband an imperative glance.

"There was such a *m'sieu'*," announced the latter slowly. "He came last autumn, and, caring not where he went, journeyed north, seeking some place where there was not to be found that which he desired to avoid."

"What was that?"

"A woman," said Jacquot.

The strange lady bit her lip and looked as if she had been struck.

"He was mistaken," she said faintly. "All that is changed now, but he does not know. Did he go far, and when does he return?"

"He went to Lac Perdu, and from there will go farther north when the ice moves. He says that he does not return."

There was a little silence, then a quick light flashed into the lovely eyes.

"Will you take me to Lac Perdu—now—quickly? How far is it?"

Jacquot stared at her.

"Five days, if the dogs are strong; for there is no winter trail."

She glanced into the stinging wilderness outside.

"Does one walk?"

"He who drives the dogs walks ahead, to break trail; but if it were possible for *madame* to go, which I doubt, she would travel on the toboggan."

The lady sprang to her feet.

"But it is possible, and you shall take me—now—at once! Should it be a matter of money, I will give anything—a hundred dollars—a thousand. It makes no matter. You must take me!"

She stood there in a whirl of excitement, her eyes sparkling, her cheeks full of color. Jacquot felt a little giddy. Then he recognized a certain well known expression on the face of Jeannette, and surrendered.

"If *madame* desires, I will take her; but one sleeps in a skin bag in a tent, and there is much else that is not at all easy. Also it is not worth a thousand dollars, or even a hundred."

She put her hand on his shoulder, slowly shaking her graceful head, and looking at him with the most wistful smile possible.

"My friend must leave it to me to say what it is worth, for it is only I who know!" she said.

## VII

THAT journey will always linger in Jacquot's mind. The snow was deep, and for five continuous days he broke trail, until his calf and thigh sinews burned like hot steel wires.

The team, composed of his three best dogs and two of Gaston's, kept on his heels, their noses down, their back muscles rippling silkily under their long, tawny hair, their traces twanging like bowstrings—a sinuous, yellow snake of a team, full of bitterness and devilment. Behind the dogs lurched the toboggan, whereon was the lovely lady—Jacquot knew her name now, but never mentioned it—muffled in furs and robes, through which he could just see her bright eyes and the roses in her cheeks.

To her it was all new and wonderful, nor had she any conception of the strength and skill of her guide. At night he put up a shed tent, building in front of it a long fire with back logs of green birch, which were piles of hot coals when morning broke. Every day she seemed stronger and happier, drinking in the sharp, clear air and responding to all the divine influences of this cedar-scented solitude.

It was on the evening of the day before they reached Lac Perdu that she lay on the mattress of spruce that Jacquot cut for her every night, and spoke again of *m'sieu'*. She wanted to know what he wore, if he seemed to be well, whether he appeared lonely, what he talked about, and if he had enough of everything. Was Jacquot sure of that?

"But certainly, *madame*. He had more of everything than any man ever had on Lac Perdu before—more books than Father Lapointe himself. As to being lonely, apparently that was what he hoped for."

"And can one live in comfort on Lac Perdu in a climate like this?"

Jacquot laughed.

"Yes, if the walls are thick and the heart stays young; but it is a great silence with no family. For myself, I would not like it."

"You have six?"

"No, *madame*, there are eight"—he paused a moment—"so far. The government at Quebec gives a hundred dollars to each child beyond the twelfth, so we shall see."

"Beyond the twelfth?" she said, amazed.

"Yes, *madame*. It is very useful to many."

"But what does one do with a family like that?"

Now this was exactly what *m'sieu'* had asked, so Jacquot replied as he did before.

"It is not a matter of how many there are, for there is always enough love to go around," he continued happily. "*Madame* has no doubt children of her own?"

The lady shook her head.

"No," she said under her breath. "No—not yet."

Jacquot, seeing her expression, shifted the talk back to Lac Perdu, telling her of the *cabane* they rebuilt for *m'sieu'*, of the moose that roamed the lower slopes, of caribou that one might watch trotting across the lake with a clicking of sharp hoofs, of fishing and spearing through the ice, of trapping and timber cruising, and how Alphonse Perideaux caught a black fox in a cone-shaped hole in the thick ice, at the bottom of which was a piece of frozen meat.

"The fox reached and reached, as Alphonse knew he must, not letting his shoulders lower than the edge of the hole, until presently he reached too far, when his shoulders slipped in and he could not recover. There he was with his hind legs and tail frozen stiff in the air, and his nose still three inches from the meat. Gaston gave eighty dollars for that skin. It was a fortune!"

The lady laughed.

"Perhaps *m'sieu'* will have one," she said.

"All things are possible, but it may be that he will spend but little time trapping. There was something else he sought on Lac Perdu."

"What was that?"

"His soul, *madame*; so it may be that he was just a little mad. As if one could discover such a thing on the ice or in the thick bush!"

The lady smiled rather sadly.

"Did he say how he had lost it?"

"Not a word; but he had the face of one who hopes to find. There are some

things, though not many, that we of Beau Rivage do not understand."

"When shall we be there?" she asked suddenly.

"If the ice is good, and there is no water on it, we shall see the *cabane* at noon."

She said nothing more that night, but lay for a long time on her side, staring into the fire, as if it were telling her stories about *m'sieu'*. Her face was a little sad, and yet, in an odd way, not unhappy. Sometimes her dark eyes were half closed, and then she seemed to have visions, for her brows arched and her lips took on a very tender curve.

Who, wondered Jacquot, was *m'sieu'*, that he should try to escape from such a one as this? It was a pity the journey was so nearly at an end. It had been like guiding a queen or empress through the woods. And what desolation that she had no children!

The ice on Lac Perdu was clear, with no water under its skin of snow, and the toboggan slithered forward as if without weight, close up behind the racing dogs. Jacquot now sat shouting on the tail of it as points and islands slid past, mantled with snow-laden pine and cedar.

Presently he indicated a dark spot far ahead. It moved slowly shoreward and disappeared.

"What is it?" she asked.

"The man of high station," said Jacquot proudly.

They drew abreast of the *cabane*, but still some distance out, and it was a moment or two before she could distinguish it. Then a pencil of gray smoke came clear against the green background, and she clapped her hands. In the next minute she sent Jacquot a queer little glance.

"If *madame* pleases, I shall wait with the dogs until there is need of me," he said.

"My friend," she answered unsteadily, "I think you are a very fine gentleman!"

### VIII

WHAT happened after that one can only describe as Jacquot could not help seeing it out of the corner of his eye; for though he did not want to appear curious, it was not possible to avoid being more or less aware of what was done by the only two other humans on Lac Perdu.

The lady went up the narrow trail from

the shore. *M'sieu'* must of a certainty have known that she was coming, but there was no sign from within. When she was twenty feet from the door, it opened suddenly, and *m'sieu'* stood staring at her. The lady stopped, put her hand to her breast, and stared back, but neither of them said a word.

Then she stretched out both her arms, took a step forward, and said one word—which must have been his name, or else her heart was breaking. Stumbling the rest of the way, she flung herself upon him and put her head on his shoulder. At that *m'sieu'* gave a great shout, picked her up as if she were a child, and shut the door.

An hour later, when Jacquot was fishing through the ice at the water hole, and wondering at the ways of those of high station, *m'sieu'* came out and beckoned. The little Frenchman kicked the snow off his shoe-packs, went in, and saw the little lady sitting in the barrel armchair. Her eyes were like sunrise, her cheeks like sunset after a shower of rain.

The face of *m'sieu'* was very strange. It seemed that all at once he wanted to be stern, yet found it difficult not to laugh. The very air in the *cabane* was tingling.

"Do you remember a letter I gave you last autumn?"

"Yes, *m'sieu'*."

"And the instruction that it was to be sent to Quebec for posting?"

"Yes, *m'sieu'*."

"Then what happened to that letter?"

Jacquot flushed.

"Jeannette, my wife, to whom I gave it, told me that Marthe Bienaimé was going to Quebec, and would attend to it; but Marthe, it seems, did not go. After that I myself went to cut logs for Philippe Tardieu—and so it remained."

While he was saying this, the lady looked from him to *m'sieu'* with the strangest and happiest expression possible, as if she did not want to miss one single word. The lips of *m'sieu'* were quivering under his tawny mustache, and little wrinkles chased one another around his eyes, which were more bright and blue than ever before. Presently he shook his head.

"You are a sad dog, Jacquot."

"Yes, *m'sieu'*, so it appears; but I am glad to be the only one who is sad in this matter."

The minute he said that they both laughed as if they would never stop.

"It is in my mind," said *m'sieu'*, after a while, "to forgive you this time, if you will never do such a thing again—and also if you will arrange something else for me."

"I promise."

"Then you will know that *madame*, my wife, is spending the rest of the winter here with me on Lac Perdu. Therefore I want a man to cook, to cut wood, and to bring such a dog team as you have with you. Know you of such a one, as much like yourself as may be?"

"There is Pierre Lalonge," said Jacquot thoughtfully. "He would come."

"We shall need to enlarge this *cabane*, and to build another for him."

"That is easy, and for a few days I could come back and help."

*M'sieu'* slapped him on the shoulder.

"Then that is settled. For the rest, you return in the spring, as arranged, but it shall be to go south again, and not north. One thing more, my friend, the greatest of all for which we thank you. It has nothing to do with this envelope, which you will give your wife from *madame*. It is because, not knowing or even asking who we were, you have served us both so well. How much you and Jeannette have done—and perhaps especially Jeannette, in the matter of a certain letter—you will never know; but I have found what I sought on Lac Perdu."

Now this could mean nothing except that *m'sieu'* had found his soul. Indeed, it actually looked as if he had; but, since the idea was ridiculous to think of, Jacquot only fingered the edge of his caribou skin tunic and looked rather foolish. As to not being aware who *m'sieu'* was, perhaps it was better to keep that in the back of his head; so he put the envelope carefully into his pocket, got a very hearty *au revoir* from *m'sieu'*, kissed *madame's* hand automatically—though he had never dreamed of doing such a thing before—and set off toward the distant mouth of the Rivière des Rêves. Rounding the point, he saw two tiny figures waving in front of the *cabane*.

On the fourth night he sat in Jeannette's kitchen. Beside them, on the table, was more money than they had ever seen before—no less than eight hundred dollars. Jeannette was staring dumfounded at the money, and then at her husband. Jacquot's lips were dry.

"It must be that they are both mad and rich, and perhaps it is not well to take it.



Behold the table covered with fortunes! But why came *m'sieu'* to Lac Perdu? How could he lose and find his soul? And why came *madame*? Had Marthe Bienaimé indeed gone to Quebec and posted that letter, which you posted here, my rascal, *madame* had never found *m'sieu'*. Why did you do this thing?"

Jeannette shook her head slowly, while her thoughts flashed back to a bitter night when a lovely face had looked into her own, and she had heard broken sentences that told of a great wrong which must be put right at any cost. The strange lady, being half dead with cold, could not have realized what she was saying then; but it was clear that having run away from the man one really loved to another whom one thought one loved more, she now knew where was

the real home of her heart, and would go to the end of the world to regain it.

No—this was a woman's matter that must always lie hid from every man save *m'sieu'* alone.

"It is in my mind," Jeannette said slowly, "that these being people of high station, we should ask nothing. Their names also it is not necessary to speak in Beau Rivage. If there is more to be said, they will say it when the ice moves out in the spring. Read the letter again, *mon vieux*."

She folded her hands, while Jacquot read huskily:

"With the grateful thanks of those who found what they sought on Lac Perdu. It seems a pity to have to wait for the action of the government in Quebec, so here is a present for Louis, Simone, Louise, Jacques, Adele, Emile, François, and little Toinette Roubidoux."

### THE NIGHT RIDE

We drove at moonrise through the pines. The road  
Was like an amber stream that dipped and flowed  
Between the tree boles; now it bent and wound,  
And now it seemed to plunge into the night  
As might an arrowy shaft, and fade from sight  
With immaterial darkness for a bound.

As we leaped on, the twin lights of the car  
Severed the gloom as does a double star;  
And there were shadowy boughs that loomed above,  
Or leaned to clasp us like the arms of love;  
And there awoke a wind whose winnowings  
Were like the beat and wafture of great wings;

And all the impenetrable shades on either side  
Imagination peopled with strange things  
That peered upon us, while far voices cried  
The music of innumerable springs.

Ah, but I wished you there to taste with me  
The eddying, flowing vernal ecstasy—  
The balsam attars and cool essences  
Of earth, and faintly down the dim aisles blown  
The dreamy fragrance of the young peach trees,  
And of the wilding plum that blooms alone.

I longed for you, my love, that you might share—  
As I do ever when I know delight—  
The exhilarating magic of the air,  
The incommunicable mystery of night!

Sennett Stephens

# Dancing Dust

HOW THE SPIRIT OF OSWALD SABIN, SCIENTIST AND PHILOSOPHER, LIVED AFTER HIS DEATH

By Herman George Scheffauer

"**B**RING me—" said Professor Oswald Sabin, but he got no further.

The deep, orotund voice, which held no hint of age—Thota reflected that its vibrant, organlike music had been one of the factors that had brought her under his tremendous spell and bound their lives together—was cut off sharp and sheer, as by a switch. As she turned on her high heel, she saw what she knew she would see—the magnificent head tossing upon the pillow, the high forehead purple with congestion, the dark brown eyes rolling, the bleached hand with the long fingers, like those of a master pianist, trembling upon the coverlet of the bed.

Paralysis had seized him again, had blasted his tongue, had snared up his throat. Had it petrified his fingers this time?

The young wife handed her husband pen and pencil. The dynamic will of the man commanded the flesh to obey, but every finger rebelled. There was a twitching—nothing more; but she knew the routine.

"Your manuscript?" she asked.

"No!" replied the large, lustrous eyes.

"Sir Thomas Browne?"

The "Religio Medici" was one of his favorite books.

"No."

"Pater's 'Renaissance'?"

"No."

"Mark Twain—his last philosophic—"

"No."

Perhaps he wanted the plans of the tower—the mysterious tower, the secret of which he had never confided to her. There it stood on the hillock above the house, dominating Sherrilton. Through the square frames of the cross-mullioned sash she saw it clearly against the clump of pines—four-square, brutal, ominous. It was like the turret of an old town wall, a hollow shaft

lifting its round metallic top to heaven. Four bosses of polished bronze were built into the stones of each side, like embedded cannon balls. A low copper dome was visible above the walls.

The plans of the tower lay in a large portfolio of pigskin, locked—the key on a silk cord around his neck.

"The plans?" she faltered.

At times he was so remote, not only in age and genius, that he no longer seemed to be her husband, but only the great man, one of humanity's heroes, a fragment of the age, of history.

His eyes shone, but the lid twitched in the negative that she understood. She suggested a dozen further alternatives, but without success.

His muscular, well knit frame seemed to dilate. The blue veins on the noble forehead swelled. The eyes sparkled as if cut in facets. The great man had become the great child. That luminous brain, which had helped to change the face of the world and the course of civilization, was battling to break through the barriers of the incommunicable—to triumph over matter; but it remained earth-bound and mute. Thought, will, and desire were shut up in the dungeon of the paralyzed body.

He had invented instruments and apparatus that were almost human—more than human, in the radius and reach of sensitive response and mechanical perception. They talked and ticked and registered, almost sentient creatures, all over the world, at this very moment; yet here their creator lay helpless.

Pity, fear—yes, a kind of horror—overcame her. If only it were over, she thought! She had learned now that veneration, respect, devotion, could not take the place of love.

Then conscience, old religious scruples, snapped up like toothed traps hidden in the grass of the days, and caught at her feet. Civilization, marriage, domesticity, the aura of his fame in which she lived—all vanished. Helpless male and weak female, they faced each other like two sphinxes of stone. A gulf lay between them, and in the crevasse, deep down, ran the roaring stream of life, divided and at different levels.

Concentrated fury now sparkled from the eyes of her husband. They were all that lived, yet they lived terribly. Their hatred, she knew, was bent not against her, but against fate. Two tears rolled down the flushed, hanging flesh of his cheeks. Should she send for Hubert Aspenwall, his assistant, his disciple? No! Not him!

She could not bear to see this ordeal, and went out. As the door closed behind her, she felt two tears roll down her own smooth cheeks. She cast a glance at a mirror in the corridor. She looked pale, she thought, and careworn. Had her husband noticed it? No. Had Hubert Aspenwall noticed it? Would he notice it?

She drew a letter from her pocket, and read it. Her face glowed, the life forces were suddenly augmented through her entire being. She kissed the signature, a large "S. W." A smile, deep and inscrutable as that of Eve, played about her lips and belied the nunlike coiffure of her dark hair.

## II

THE morning of the second day after this seizure saw Oswald Sabin partially restored. He was now eager to rise, but Thora forbade it. She said to herself, laying a comforting unction to her questioning heart:

"It is best for him."

Then she asked herself the question which she hoped would drive out self-reproach:

"Am I not solicitous for his welfare? Am I not?"

To her husband she said:

"What was it you wanted, Oswald?"

A smile spread over his face. It was that sweet, shining smile that made the austere face, in its frame of long hair, almost boyish. The ice that had bound his arms and fingers was gone. He waved his hands in the air, and snapped his fingers.

"It is the acme of the atrocious, dear," said he. "Think of it! I who have enabled journalists, politicians, stock jobbers,

and lovers to see and jabber with one another simultaneously and at a dozen spots between New York and Melbourne—and have thereby advanced civilization a full half inch—could not find a way to tell you that I wanted you to take down that fiddle on the wall!"

She took it down and pressed it into his hands, and then the bow.

"And now a sheet of Bristol board from the drafting room, and some fine sand—that from the broken hourglass will do."

She brought him all these. As he dallied gracefully with fiddle and bow, he reminded her of some great *maestro*. His silver mane was like that of Lizst.

"The time has come, Thora," he said with a mellow gravity, "for you to know about—"

A fit of coughing seized him. His neck and forehead reddened. Great God! What if another stroke—

"Yes?" she said tensely. "Yes?"

He recovered himself slowly. The words writhed out between the strong, slightly yellowed teeth:

"The tower!"

At last! One of the shadows, the secrets that had lain between them, was about to pass. She knew by every tiny fiber of her woman's instinct that this strange structure of stone was not to be devoted to science alone—that in some way it was bound up with his destiny and hers.

"The tower," he went on, pointing in its direction with the bow, "is not only an observation point, a nucleus of forces. It is a musical instrument."

"A musical instrument!"

"It is a harp."

"What?"

"An Æolian harp."

"I do not understand," she said.

"You shall; but it is also a home—"

"A home?"

"A habitation, for some one to live there after—"

"After?"

"After he is dead. Yes, it is a tomb—a mausoleum—"

"For whom?"

"For me—first for me, then perhaps for you."

She was silent. Cold settled over her soul. That "perhaps" had given her heart a wrench; but the letter in her bosom was there. A heart seemed to beat out of it against hers!



"You know the conditions of our living together, and of our—dying alone?"

"Yes," she said. "I've kept—I'll keep them."

"You have known only a part of them, dear—the part connected with dying—my dying. You know," he went on, "I've tried to teach men to regard both living and dying as a seemly feast. It was easy to teach the joy of life, even with all its concomitants of pain; but who would believe that the end of living might also involve a kind of rapture—deep, still, serene? It was necessary to teach *that*—far more necessary than the other. It is not easy—it is perhaps only for the elect. To most men, growing old may be like growing poor. I have grown rich with the treasures of life, but I feel that I am also weak—that I must keep on bringing up this great truth now that I must soon put it to the test. The Socratic passing—that is the secret! But in spite of my regret at leaving life—above all, leaving you, dearest"—he caught her hand, kissed it, and fondled it—"I know I shall play the end as I intended."

"You know it, and therefore you will," she faltered.

"My going is cheered by the thought that it will mean liberation for you, that you will be happy with my pupil, my heir, the man I love above all others—Hubert Aspenwall. He alone can carry on and complete my work. My work must go on—you must help him."

The sick man was silent for a moment, then resumed:

"I, too, shall live on—as dust lives—"

She thought of his rationalism, crystal cold, yet always bound up with a kind of high poetry and religious feeling.

"As dust lives and is full of joy. See here!"

He smoothed the sand upon the paper, and held the violin above it, upside down. He then drew the bow sharply across the strings, tearing a long, deep, tremulous note from them. The sand trembled and danced. It rushed together in drifts and lines, and thickened and thinned in spirals that opened and closed, ebbed and flowed.

He changed the note, and the fine yellow sand took still other shapes and forms. Thora stared, uncomprehending.

"Suppose, Thora, that this dust were—human!"

"Oh! What an idea!"

"It is an idea full of immensities. I,

the austere, stoic man of science, will give the world a last gift before I die—a new beauty, a new expression for life, for death—a symbol for immortality. I shall continue to live, for motion is life, in the sense of science! I shall continue to preach—to teach"—he smiled his bitter, sweet, ironic smile—"to sing! Even pilgrims may come to Sherrilton, to this house—the Sabin Museum—to my tower!"

He sat sunk in silence, like a king brooding upon eternity. Her voice seemed harsh, like the everyday things of the world:

"And yet, Oswald, I do not understand."

"The tower over there," he resumed, "is like this violin. It is really a huge harp, an Æolian harp, built to last, of tempered bands and tuned chords of copper, phosphor bronze, iron, silver, and strips of thin gold. All are delicately attuned, according to my principles. In the copper hood of the tower are four openings—air gates, at present sealed up. They face north, east, south, and west. These mouths open into tubes and cylinders. Embedded under the chords of the great wind harp is a vibrant plate—a tympanum as sensitive as a seismograph. On the west side of the tower, near the top, there is a loose stone. After I am dead—or, let us say, after these paralytic nerves and muscles and bones have been refined into a canisterful of thin, crisp dust and ashes—*pulvis et cinis*—this stone is to be removed, the ashes poured in, and the stone cemented into place."

A great happiness beamed from his eyes. His face was irradiated, as she had always seen it when some great discovery of his was perfected.

He went on, and ecstasy lightened in him, as from some iridescent core within. His voice rang distant and detached, as if it were already proceeding from the tower, as if he were addressing multitudes that stood below. He saw them, the generations, the ant hills of humanity for which he had labored and suffered and dreamed, and which were like the sand upon the paper before him.

"When the winds blow, I shall be with you all. With every one of the four winds I shall speak differently to you, running the whole gamut of life and all the emotions that range between joy and grief, between love and hate—the eternal attraction, the eternal repulsion, which is life and change. The dust that was Oswald Sabin shall continue to live, to leap, to dance—now to a

zephyr, now to a hurricane—for years, for decades, for centuries. Thus I shall continue to be active in the universe, in the eternal dance of the atoms. My whole being shall be thrilled with the fresh, pure breath of the winds of the world. I shall hear and feel and smell and taste the earth—the air—”

## III

PROFESSOR OSWALD SABIN died three weeks later. For several weeks he lived again in the press of every land, in memorial services in every tongue, in the magnetic blood of the almost superhuman instruments he had invented.

After the cremation, the stone in the tower was removed. Only the widow and Hubert Aspenwall stood on the tower. Thora lifted the copper canister with the thin ashes, but her hands shook—the canister almost fell from her clasp. Aspenwall took the container and poured in the gray mass. A thin musical tinkling and rustling came from within, as if a legion of mice were scrambling along tubes of glass.

Aspenwall, dressed in black from head to foot, pressed the hand of the widow; but she withdrew it quickly, and ran down the circular iron staircase, then down the hill to the house. Aspenwall leaned over the parapet and watched her. He knew then that one of the burning desires of his master would never be carried out.

The soul of Thora Sabin, freed from the bands that had bound it, half in reverence, half in a sort of daughterly love, to the great man, now reached forth for a warmer, more passionate life—a life of which she had dreamed as a wider existence. She, the incarnation of smoldering impulses and yearnings, of loverlike yet maternal instincts, was never intended to be a scientist's wife. She hated science, she feared Hubert Aspenwall, who was a scientist, and a priestly scientist, in every fiber of his nature. He was bound by a pledge which she knew he would keep—to carry out the uncompleted work of Oswald Sabin, the master whom he adored, the task to which he was consecrated.

After a few attempts to win Thora—soul searing encounters in which her aversion to him accentuated itself to a glow of hatred that left him dumb—Aspenwall gave up all hope. He left in despair, taking Sabin's papers with him—among them the plans of the tower—and removed the entire

laboratory to a neighboring villa. The tower, strangely enough, remained mute to all winds—Aspenwall alone knew why.

After a year Thora Sabin married Sanders Wright, an old schoolmate of hers. He was a laughing, blond *viveur*, a loose, debonair devil. She scarcely recognized the man whom she had once known and loved, and who had written her such moving letters from abroad.

Wright scoffed at the idea of converting the mansion into a Sabin Museum of Science. It began to blaze, from basement to attic, night after night. The garden broke into a revel of Japanese lanterns. Music came from the grounds. Dancing forms swept past the windows.

Mrs. Wright and her husband were burning life at both ends. The professor's fortune furnished candles and matches. Aspenwall, a heavy hearted recluse, sat in his laboratory, communing with the spirit of his great teacher, agonizing over the solution of the problems left him as a legacy.

## IV

“WHAT'S this big metal band?” asked Sanders Wright, one day.

He had encountered a flat strip of copper, half an inch thick and two inches broad, which ran through a clothes closet off the hall. It seemed to pierce the house from top to bottom.

“I don't know,” said Thora. “It has something to do with the lightning rod, I believe.”

The first indication of a voice from the fourth dimension was recorded by the telephone instruments of Sherrilton. There was a strange, unusual vibration in the ear pieces—an almost eerie ringing, higher than the human register.

The center of the disturbance was traced to a telephone pole in close proximity to the tower. Aspenwall advised the removal of the pole to another position, and the disturbance ceased.

But why was the tower dumb? Why did the Æolian mechanism fail to operate? Could Sabin have made a miscalculation? People said that his widow still held the key which would release the voice of the harp; but Wright had forbidden its use. In a fit of retrospective jealousy, he had even caused her to destroy all that still linked her life, or her memories, with Professor Sabin.

Aspenwall was working out mysterious

formulas. Wright made threats. If the infernal tower should begin to give voice, he would blow it up with dynamite.

Spookish myths began to spread about Sherrilton. Some one who had been in the grounds, one night, had put his ear to the stone, and had heard strange murmurs and tickings within. Another said that the copper bosses that stood out like angry carbuncles on the four sides of the tower—powerful electrodes or poles—had glowed with a purplish fluorescence.

Aspenwall remained buried in his laboratory. At times, but always at night, he emerged, dressed in overalls like a workman, his hands and his face shining with a thin coat of greenish grime. Some tremendous experiment was under way. Forces were being marshaled for some battle between occult and material powers.

Meanwhile the big house continued to ring with revelry. Strange, dissipated creatures, Wright's former cronies, came in motor cars from the metropolis. Thora Wright, whose beauty had taken on a challenging and perilous cast, often galloped forth in a mannish riding costume, on a cream-colored horse.

Then, one night, a warm summer's night, the tower began to speak. It was actually more like human speech than mechanical music. It was more like a song than speech. Its unearthly melody, its compelling sorcery, went forth wonderfully into the night.

It invaded the windows of Thora Wright's rooms, her ears, her whole soul. She arose, trembling. *His* voice! It was persuasive, sweet, full of that irresistible, moving magic which he had been able to impart to it, even as an old man. It was the voice with which, invested with the halo of his fame, he had wooed and won her.

She thrust her feet into her slippers, stole past Sanders Wright—who was dozing sottishly on the sofa in the library—went out into the warm air, and crept to the tower. His dust—the dust that had loved her—was dancing within, under the impulse of that mild breeze!

The trees rustled. The whole earth seemed warm. He was living again, speaking in the wind. What message lay in this music, metallic, yet full of superhuman sweetness? Was it a complaint, an accusation, or a lament?

She seemed somehow to feel the presence of Hubert Aspenwall, his voice mingling with that of her dead husband. A light was

burning in the turret room of the scientist's laboratory.

## V

ONE moonlit night, when Sanders Wright was smoking in his garden, he saw Dr. Aspenwall come out of the tower and lock the ponderous steel door, as thick as that of a treasury vault. He ran and caught the frail scientist by the neck.

"You sneaking whelp, creeping around here like a thief!" he bellowed. "I'll teach you—"

Aspenwall turned and grappled with him.

"I'm here by authority of Professor Sabin, as you know," he said.

"Sabin's dead and gone to hell!" shouted Wright. "Dead men have no authority here!"

He struck Aspenwall full in the face. Blood flowed down the scientist's pale, scholarly cheek. His thin figure trembled, his dark eyes blazed. He choked, then wrested himself free.

"The next time I'll kill you, like a burglar!" snarled Wright. "Get out!"

"You will hear—from us—both!" said Aspenwall at last, in a voice that seemed to come ventriloquistically from his inmost depths.

His lips, dark with blood, were motionless. He turned and went.

Two nights afterward the heavens were broken up, the clouds were balled and battered together, by a fierce norther. In the intervals of the howling hurricane and the booming thunder, the voice of the tower was heard—a deep, sonorous music, hard, prophetic, oracular, a sound as of spheres of ice and iron ricocheting across the firmamental plateaus, as of a titanic foghorn blowing from both poles, an august and awful symphony.

The whole house vibrated with it. A ball of flame, like St. Martin's fire upon mastheads at sea, played about the glittering point of the lightning rod and the four bronze bosses.

"It is his voice!" cried Thora.

There was no escape from the tremendous tumult of the tones. She ran in terror to the tiny closet off the corridor, to bury her head in the rugs and curtains stored there.

The dust of the dead man was convulsed by the storm. Every atom of that great mind was dancing to this stupendous or-



chestra. Nay, she had the feeling that he was leading it—that this pile of ashes was the true heart of the tempest.

The whole house sang and vibrated like telegraph wires in the wind. The copper band that had passed through the closet thrilled like a gigantic tuning fork. It seemed to grow warm to her hand.

After this she almost yielded to Wright's persistent demands that she should sell the house and let him invest the money. There were offers for the property; but in this, at least, she resolved to be true to her trust.

The tower and the house were now elevated by the population of Sherrilton to the distinction of being veritably haunted. The offers from would-be purchasers ceased; the parties ceased, too, and the dances. Sometimes cries and loud quarrelings were heard. People said that Wright had gone from bad to worse, that he was drinking desperately, and even beating his wife.

The tower had become a wonder and a mystery. Often, when the soft winds from the south poured themselves into the wide copper throat that gaped toward that point of the heavens, a wonderful music streamed forth over the landscape and the town, and every one paused to listen. Unutterable yearning, love, rapture, a golden sensuousness that tore at every nerve of joy, flooded the air like amber. Women and girls felt their hearts melt within them, and the men they loved found them without will in this hour.

Then, again, a boisterous west wind, tearing in from the sea, would set the chords ringing. The soft notes became brazen trumpet choruses, goads to the blood, calls to adventure, clarion challenges cascading down from the blue dome or darting from the steel eyes of the stars. Men felt a strange spirit of daring, a hatred of home and women, a call as of deserts, mountain peaks, boundless plains, and dark forests, a summons to war and battle.

When the wind was from the east, and strong enough, the chanting tower sang a high, thin note, an austere, cold, glasslike music, devoid of all earthly resonance or echo, a crystalline symphony in the upper registers. It turned one's thoughts to eternal things—to religions, ascetic philosophies, Uranian and Utopian yearnings and aspirations that transcended flesh and fire.

When the northers raged, the tower's notes became like iron—deep bass sounds, as of the pipes of a great organ rolling forth

a sonorous threnody, a pæan of death, a black, majestic music that drove gloom into every heart. When weddings or festivals were to take place at Sherrilton, the first question was whether the wind might blow from the north on that day.

What was most remarkable, however, was the fact that the voice in the tower was often audible, and powerfully audible, to the denizens of the mansion, when it was silent to all others. One could step out of the zone of clamorous sound about the house into an area where, save for a low humming, stillness reigned. What did this mean? Wright said that it was due to Aspenwall's "infernal jugglery."

"I'll do for the dog—and the tower, too!" he cried.

## VI

ONE Monday afternoon Wright came back from the city with a number of big dynamite cartridges. These he showed to a cory of his, then stored them in his room.

A great terror came upon Thora. What should she do? Should she flee from her home?

On Friday night she was roused out of sleep by a tempest of sound. A storm was roaring through the trees without. Thunder growled, and rain swashed in sheets against the windows. The tower was sending abroad a stupendous uproar of long-drawn, snoring notes, a threatening thunder, as of some prophet invoking doom upon the world, harsh iron tones of judgment, death, and destruction.

Again she heard his voice in it—Oswald Sabin's, a voice full of anger, horror, and denunciation. She leaped from bed, and hastily slipped on shoes and a coat. A light shone from her husband's room. With horror in her heart, she saw him at work, preparing the dynamite cartridges. His eyes were lighted evilly, his face a mask of malice, his lips thin and sinister.

She entered the room.

"For God's sake—"

A sudden shock, a loud curse, an overturned chair—cries, shrieks, the sound of a falling body.

A little later that night Hubert Aspenwall, active amid the instruments in his lonely laboratory, his ears full of the planetary music of the tower, seemed to hear his name called in a treble voice that pierced

compellingly through all the plangent, ringing chords.

"Dr. Aspenwall! Hubert! Hubert!"

He hurried down, an electric torch in his hand. Thora stood before the door in the nimbus of light, her hair and face wet with the rain. A red smear ran across her chin from her upper lip, which was split and swollen. One of her eyes seemed contused and bloodshot.

"Mrs. Sabin!" he cried, remembering her only by that name. "Thora! Your lips! What—"

"He struck me," she said listlessly. Then she seized Aspenwall's arm, and cried: "He's going to blow up the tower! He's preparing the dynamite—in his room!"

"Sit here!" Hubert ordered abruptly, and pushed her down upon an old sofa in the porch. He then ran upstairs to his laboratory.

The storm increased. The skies opened in blinding rifts. The thunder seemed part of the grandiose orchestra, overtopped by the clearer, higher symphony of the tower. The music became like a knell—as of countless church bells tolling, as of a chorus sung by an innumerable multitude of the damned, mingled with a high, accusatory voice as of some god pronouncing judgment. To Thora, afterward, it seemed as if she were present at a conclave of powers debating upon the birth of a new world.

Overhead she heard the snapping of sparks and the humming and thrilling notes of mysterious instruments. The tower, lifting darkly against the shifting clouds, became a center of terrible energies. It stood outlined with a glow of violet rose, and the bronze bosses shone like iron

heated to a cherry red—or was it only her poor, throbbing eyes that saw it thus?

An eerie, many-stranded rope of twitching phosphorescence began to play between the bosses in the tower and the lightning rod upon the roof of the house. The flat dome gleamed magically, growing whiter and whiter. An oppressive heat filled the air, an indescribable tension that made the eardrums ring. There was a chaos of light and sound and choking metallic fumes.

Her senses reeled, and a great swoon seemed to come over the world. Over all she heard the clamor of the singing tower, charged with unimaginable, mysterious potencies—the voice of Oswald Sabin, chanting an apocalyptic doom from the skies.

Suddenly the dark bulk of the house parted like a riven wall. A bar of vertical light seemed to cleave it asunder like a sword. An enormous flame bloomed out of one of the collapsing halves. Then came a crash as of worlds in ruin, and a rain of glass fell about her like the fragments of her shattered life.

She knew nothing more until Hubert Aspenwall raised her and led her out into the open. Where the house had stood there was only a tall, livid rod, gleaming with a violet radiance in the night, and humming like an enormous tuning fork.

The storm still raged; but from the tower there now came a soft, enchanting music, a note of peace and happiness, a paean of joy and release.

"It is *his* will!" said Aspenwall defiantly, yet solemnly, as he led her down to the highroad. "It is *my* will!" he added, as they hurried down toward Sherrilton.

"And mine!" she whispered, as she laid her hand in his.

### THE LAMP IS LIGHTED

In this our West, where evening hills descend,  
The lamp is lighted for the coming guest;  
The lantern by the door awaits a friend,  
In this our West.

These marching stars upon their midnight quest  
Seek shadow worlds to conquer and defend—  
Stars militant in armor manifest.  
Along your road, with moons around the bend,  
Ride, follower of beauty unconfessed!  
The lantern by my door will be the end,  
In this our West.

Mary Louise Mabie.

# Poison Ivy

A STORY OF THE GOOD AND EVIL IN THE LIFE OF A SMALL  
AMERICAN TOWN

By Louis Lacy Stevenson

Author of "Big Game," etc.

THE scene of the story is the small Ohio town of Unionville, and its characters are typical people of such a community. The leading citizen of the place is Judge Browne, who lives on the hill above the river, with no one but an old colored servant, Martha Green—until his house burns down, and he goes to stay with his friend, Aaron Burns, president of the Union National Bank. Charley Mechant and Tom Spiers are tellers at the bank, and rival suitors of Nelly Miller, the belle of Unionville. Gabriel White is town marshal, and a bitter foe of Will Wilson, who runs a gambling house which Frank Valley, the mayor, protects for political reasons.

Another character in the tale is a stranger who drifts into town, and who is nicknamed the Snake Feeder, because his tall, thin frame suggests one of the winged insects more generally known as dragon flies or darned needles. Chancing to meet Judge Browne, the Snake Feeder makes mysterious threats against the magistrate, which seem to terrify him; but nothing further develops, the stranger staying on quietly at the St. George Hotel, apparently with nothing to do except to drink more whisky than is good for him.

The story is told by a high school boy, who shares many adventures with his two friends, Dewey and Squank; but his chief interest in life is his sweetheart, pretty Mamie Merrill.

Three other Unionville boys, Walter Swope, Raymond Baxter, and Paul Duke, all employed in local stores, are arrested for stealing from their employers. All three have been victimized by Will Wilson, and on their trial the Snake Feeder—who volunteers to defend them, and proves to be a qualified attorney—makes such an eloquent plea for the boys, and such a scathing attack on Wilson as the real criminal, that the jury acquits them.

## XV

IMMEDIATELY after Walter, Raymond, and Paul were freed, Gabriel White left town, without stating his destination. In his absence, Orrie Smith wore the big silver star. The three boys got their jobs back, and so thoroughly cured were they of gambling that they wouldn't even go by Wilson's place. Time after time they tried to thank grandfather for going on their bond. He would never listen, however, but would tap his cane impatiently and talk about something else.

Will Wilson didn't stand before his stairway any more, either. He was as inconspicuous as possible. What the Snake Feeder had said about him in court, and what Dr. Boone had said about him in church, had made many see him in a new light. Some of his best friends avoided him in public. Most of his better-class patrons gave up visiting his place, and there

were some nights when it was not lighted up at all.

This was really reform on the part of those who liked to gamble, because there was no lack of money in Unionville. Crops, especially onions, had sold at good prices, and all the merchants were doing a big business, as were the saloons.

The trial brought the Snake Feeder considerable fame as a lawyer. If he had so wished, he could have had several cases; but he declined all offered him, on the ground that he was too busy to take them. As a matter of fact, he spent much of his time on the porch of the St. George, his feet cocked up and his eyes gazing at nothing. That was, of course, when he wasn't in the Good Luck.

Despite Wilson's threats, he was unafraid, though sometimes he and the gambler stood at bars side by side.

Dewey, Squank, and I dropped into the Union National occasionally. Tom Spiers



always said he was glad to see us, but he seemed to be changed. His laughter sounded forced and his conversation lacked sparkle. He didn't go to Nelly Miller's any more, either. Not that she lacked company. Every time we passed her house, after banking hours, Charlie Mechant was there.

"I guess Charlie has cut old Tom out," said Dewey. "I wonder what has happened! Up to the night of the Fleur de Lis dance, Tom seemed to be going good, and Charlie stood nowhere."

That set us to thinking. Something had happened at that dance. Nelly and Tom weren't talking when they left the hall.

I resolved to do some detective work, but I learned nothing. In the end, I went to Nelly Miller. I felt privileged to do so because she had appealed to me when she was in trouble, and because Tom Spiers was my friend. He had had a hand in bringing Mamie back to me. He had helped Nelly Miller, too, but, being a gentleman, he hadn't told her about that.

"What's wrong with you and Tom?" I asked.

"Nothing," she replied frigidly.

"He doesn't come here any more."

"What business is that of yours, Mr. Nosey?"

"That's a nice thing to say to me, Nelly Miller," I retorted, and continued ungallantly: "I remember one night when you didn't talk to me like that!"

"Forgive me," she said, softening instantly, as women do. "Really there isn't anything wrong between Tom and me. I like Charlie's company better—that's all. Even in Unionville, a girl is allowed to choose her men friends, isn't she?"

"Yes, but—"

"The trouble with you is that you have it in for Charlie. Why don't you like him? I think he's much nicer-looking than Tom, and he's a far better dancer. Half a dozen girls in this town would die of happiness if he would run after them."

"That's right, but—"

"I know what's troubling you—that talk about Charlie and me. Well, you know that was all a mistake. When an old gossip like Mrs. Jimminson goes around voluntarily taking back what she's said, and acknowledging she was mistaken, you can be sure that there was nothing to it in the first place. I'll admit I was hurt terribly at the time, but it's all over now, and it should be forgotten."

Voluntarily! And Doc Jimminson battered up!

"Are you sure you aren't making a mistake?" I asked.

The poker game on the river bank and Will Wilson's remarks were in my mind.

"Aren't you the serious young man? Don't worry about me—I'm old enough to know my way around!"

"Something happened at the Fleur de Lis dance."

"Bright eyes! I merely found out something—that's all. Charlie Mechant would never let me be a wallflower."

"But, Nelly—"

I checked myself. I had a suspicion, but no proof. Poor old Tom was as innocent as a baby, but I couldn't convince Nelly that he hadn't cut that dance intentionally, and that he was a victim of that scheming Charlie Mechant—not when she had those torches in her cheeks. If she had been crying, or on the verge of crying, I might have mentioned my suspicion of what Charlie had done with her program, but such a suggestion would only complicate matters now.

I had learned much about women. Evidently the whole trouble was that both she and Tom were so high-spirited that neither would give in enough to advance an explanation that would clear up the whole matter.

"Well, good night, then," I concluded lamely.

"Don't go away angry. We needn't quarrel. We're still friends, no matter how I feel toward some one else. You helped me once, too, and I'm glad you and Mamie have made up. I hope you will stay that way!"

So did I—frankly.

Nelly shook hands with me and gave me my hat. For my part, I wasn't anxious to linger, for I was due at Mamie's at half past eight. I got there one minute ahead of time.

Mamie was the one who switched the conversation around to Tom and Nelly. She was even more puzzled than I, though she had talked with Nelly several times. Evidently a girl isn't as frank with a girl as she is with a man. Nelly hadn't even intimated to Mamie that Tom had cut a dance with her. As I regarded my talk with Nelly as entirely confidential, I didn't tell Mamie the little I had learned; nor did I mention my suspicion.

Mamie brought out something else that I hadn't noticed until she mentioned it. Charlie Mechant didn't look any happier than Tom. In fact, he seemed almost morose. Being allowed to call on Nelly every night should have been a certain indication to him, in the light of his experience with women, that he had beaten Tom Spiers, but he didn't seem to be elated over it. We were sure that he cared more for Nelly than for any other girl in town, but he took a strange way of showing satisfaction at having eliminated competition.

"He acts as if he's worried about something," said Mamie.

I was silent. Perhaps he was. Tom Spiers could break him in two.

Mamie's mother brought in some lemonade and talked with us, and soon it was time for me to go.

A day or two later Gabriel White returned. Orrie Smith gave up the star and went back to wearing the shield. The marshal didn't say where he had been, but the rest had done him good. He was more like his old self than he had been since he arrested Raymond, Walter, and Paul.

The return of Gabriel White seemed to help Will Wilson's business—or perhaps it had nothing to do with it, and it was merely the urge of gambling that sent men up that stairway. Whatever the cause, however, on the Saturday after the marshal got back so many men climbed the stairs that some of the late comers, evidently unable to find accommodations at the poker tables or the faro layout, tramped down again, with disappointed looks on their faces.

Wilson's patrons that day were mostly men from near-by towns and the marsh, though some of Unionville's more sporty residents were up there also, because we recognized them.

At about four o'clock Dewey, Squank, and I saw Charlie Mechant come out of the Union National and walk hurriedly in the direction of Wilson's. He stopped at the Good Luck for about ten minutes, and then went up the stairway.

"He thought he needed a bracer or two before bucking the tiger," said Dewey.

"Charlie had better watch his step! It's bad enough to drink whisky and play cards at night, but to run away from work to take a drink and sit in means a lost job," observed Squank.

Charlie had been out of sight for five or ten minutes, and we were about to move

on, when Gabriel White came along, followed by Unionville's entire police force. Even an old fellow who was known as the colonel, and who was more of a watchman than a policeman, being employed by the merchants to see that their store doors were locked and the night lamps burning over their safes, brought up the rear of the procession. At Will Wilson's stairway the officers formed into twos, and, with their clubs drawn, marched up, Gabriel in the lead.

Suspecting that something out of the ordinary was about to happen, Dewey, Squank, and I exercised the prerogative of the male citizens of Unionville, and followed the four officers as closely as we could.

The stout door at the top of the stairs was closed, and Gabriel White and his force stopped. We could hear the sound of voices raised in an argument. One was Charlie Mechant's, the other Will Wilson's. Then came the noise of a struggle, and Gabriel White opened the door.

Charlie was wrestling with Wilson, who had drawn his revolver. Patrons of the establishment, their cards and chips forgotten, were cowering as far as possible in the background. One—Dan Patten, the portly butcher of Unionville, who should have been in his shop attending to his Saturday afternoon trade, but who was a confirmed poker player—had crawled under a card table, his size causing it to hump up curiously, and his nervousness giving it a jerky motion, as if it were alive.

We were hardly in the room when Charlie, by a violent effort, grabbed a paper from Wilson's side coat pocket, wrenched himself free, and tried to flee, stumbling over a chair in the attempt. Wilson raised the pistol.

"Stop!" ordered Gabriel White.

The room was silent instantly, even that nervous card table at rest. Wilson swung around, covering the marshal with his weapon.

"I've got you right where I want you now, William Wilson!" announced the marshal, disregarding the pistol. "The mayor wouldn't act, so I went to Columbus and saw the Governor. He gave me a State warrant for your arrest. You're on your way to the pen!"

The gambler's face became the color of Roquefort cheese, and his Adam's apple worked up and down, as he stepped backward, still aiming that heavy revolver at Gabriel White.

"You big onion tramper, you can't pinch me!" he husked. "Move a hoof, and I'll drill you!"

Gabriel White removed his handcuffs from under his coat, opened them, and reached for Wilson's wrist.

There was an ear splitting report, a little puff of smoke, and Gabriel crumpled to the floor. The bullet had gone through his heart, and he died almost without a tremor.

With his weapon menacing the other officers, who stood there helplessly, Wilson backed up slowly until he reached a side window, through which he dropped lightly to the roof of a shed and was gone. The three policemen then came to life, and followed him with drawn pistols.

Instantly confusion reigned. Men stampeded out of that place of murder, and we were carried along by the human tide that tumbled down the narrow stairway.

From lip to lip the news that Will Wilson had shot and killed Gabriel White in cold blood flashed over Unionville. Men poured out of the saloons, some with their glasses of whisky or beer still in their hands. Stores teeming with trade became barren, while proprietors and clerks alike followed their customers to the street. Isaac Body, his smoky leather apron hiding his knees, took with him the hammer with which he had been beating a glowing horseshoe.

The street in front of Wilson's was congested with a milling mass of men, demanding details, swearing incoherently, aimless and directionless, until a mountain of a man leaped upon an upended barrel and screamed:

"Find Wilson and lynch him!"

He was John Lucas, the marsh giant, who months before had almost caused the death of Gabriel White when the marshal had tried to arrest him. Now, in a speech punctuated with epithets, he announced that he loved Gabriel White because Gabriel had licked him man fashion, fairly and squarely, and had thrust him into the calaboose.

"And I'm not going home until we find that damned murderer and string him up!" he yelled. "I'll tie the knot on his neck and pull the rope myself. Those who are men, follow me!"

He didn't have to wait for a response. He was the leader the mob lacked. Those who had weapons ran home and got them. Others made purchases, and Berwind's gun rack was stripped bare. Men thrust cartridges loaded with buckshot into double-

barreled shotguns, while others, most of them dead shots, loaded long Winchesters with soft-nosed ammunition.

Will Wilson was armed. He knew, of course, that arrest meant inevitable death, whether legally or otherwise; and undoubtedly he would resist capture. If he did, he would be riddled with bullets. Wild-eyed men almost prayed that he would undertake to shoot it out rather than surrender.

Unionville was in the clutches of blood rage. It was seeing through a vermillion mist. Gabriel White was loved—loved alive, and loved even more now that he was lying upstairs dead. He had always done his duty, and Unionville respected him. In his little cottage were a wife and two small children.

Will Wilson was hated. There was no division of sentiment now. Those who had condoned him and his business in the past were the loudest in their denunciations, as if by their outcry they would purge themselves of whatever blame might rest on them.

Cooler men—men who loved Gabriel White—saw only another crime in hanging Will Wilson without the orderly process of the law; but they were thrust aside, howled down, and all but mistreated. Finally they were silent. Against such a tide they could not swim.

Led by Lucas, who had mounted one of the horses detached from his wagon, shouting, brandishing weapons, cursing because no bloodhounds were available, the mob started in search for the gambler. Up and down the streets of the town they raged, through the lumber yards, along the river bank, even into the cemetery, and finally out into the surrounding country. Time and time again, with great clamor, false leads were followed, but to no avail. Will Wilson had vanished.

At dawn, exhausted, discouraged, the mob melted away to its homes, and the tumult was stilled.

## XVI

AFTER his leap from the shed to the ground, Will Wilson ran swiftly through the alleys, heading south, until he reached the railroad track. Here the weeds, now brown and dead, but still thick along the ditch at the edge of the right of way, formed a screen. There he crouched down and listened intently.

To his relief, he could hear no indica-



tion of pursuit. The mob was still in front of his gambling room, and the officers had gone in another direction.

He wormed his way along in the dry ditch until he found the river bank. Forced to come into the open, he dashed to a willow clump, and in the midst of this he burrowed down into the dead leaves as far as possible.

Up to that time he had had no definite plan of escape. His one desire was to get as far as possible from that inert heap of blue that had once been the marshal of Unionville. He was sick of bloodshed, but there were five more cartridges in his revolver, and he would not be taken without a battle.

The inaction preyed on his overwrought nerves to such an extent that he imagined he heard voices. He was thankful that his grayish-brown clothes blended with the autumn landscape.

The passing minutes brought increasing uneasiness. The frost had stripped the branches of the willows, and only bare switches were between him and observation. He would have to find a better place.

Wriggling on his stomach, careless of smearing slime and scratching roots, he inched along the bank until he reached a tangle of bushes. Still crawling, he forced his way through these, back from the stream, until he came to a small pool surrounded by willows.

At sight of the stagnant water a plan shot into his brain. He would immerse himself until night, catch a freight train, and get out of Unionville. There were a dozen cities, all within easy distance, where he could hide, and in the money belt that he always wore were five thousand-dollar bills. Long ago he had prepared for just such an emergency—not that he had planned to kill Gabriel White, or anybody else, but because he had a feeling that some day he would have to leave Unionville so suddenly that he would lack time to draw his savings from the bank.

He stepped into the pool with a shudder. The dirty water was chilly, and his feet sank into the soft bottom mud. With a dread of snakes adding to his discomfort, he waded out neck deep. Making as little disturbance as possible, he pulled leaves and fallen twigs to him until he had enough to construct a blind. This done, he stood there, the cold seeping through him, the stale water sickening him; but he was safe.

Even should searchers approach, they would not drag the pool.

There were no dogs to fear. Up to a short time before Colonel Fox had owned a pair of bloodhounds with cool, keen noses; but they ate as much as two men, the colonel said, so he sold them to the sheriff of some county down in Kentucky. Will Wilson was as grateful as his nature permitted him to be for the expensive appetites of those animals. If they had been baying on the edge of the pool, he doubted if he could control himself enough to stand immobile, especially with the chill that was going through his body.

The darkness seemed slow in coming, though at that time of the year it was fairly black at six. With nerves on edge he waited and waited, and as he waited his chance of escape—he could think of little else—seemed more and more hopeless. Suppose the train was stopped and searched before it got out of Unionville? He would be strung up to the nearest tree, and his body riddled with bullets!

If he did get away, what good would it do him? The telegraph had probably carried the news of his crime everywhere. No matter where he stopped, officers would be waiting for him. He had killed a policeman, and those coppers, damn them, stuck together!

If he was arrested? He had committed murder. There would be a short trial, with everybody testifying against him. At its conclusion the judge would say:

"I sentence you to be hanged by the neck until you are dead, and may God have mercy on your soul!"

He had read about hangings, and had even thought of being hanged—for a brief flash, as Em Richards dropped when Wilson shot him years before; but Richards had only been wounded, and he had escaped the noose and the trap that time.

Why had he killed White? He seemed like two men, one questioning, and the other answering. God knew he didn't intend to pull that trigger! Some force outside of him had caused the pressure of his finger. He had merely intended to cover the marshal until he could get away. If Gabe White hadn't been such a fool as to come at him! It was his own fault that he was dead!

But the jury wouldn't see it that way, nor would the judge. The judge didn't like him, though he had voted for him. He

only looked away when Wilson spoke to him. He couldn't see a gambler. The judge thought such men were a blight on Unionville, and the judge was Unionville!

That damned Snake Feeder—he was the guilty one. If he hadn't horned into the trial of those youngsters, public sentiment wouldn't have solidified behind Gabe White and backed him up to such an extent that he dared to go over Valley's head and get a State warrant. Gabe White would have been alive, and Wilson, accustomed to soft living, clean silk underwear, the best of clothes, and choice food, wouldn't be standing in a stagnant pool with the fear of death on him.

Why hadn't he shot the Snake Feeder that day in the court room? He would have been tried, certainly, but the verdict could hardly have been more than second degree, and the maximum punishment for that was life in the penitentiary. Moreover, he had influence. He had got out of prison once before. He would not die down in Columbus.

Though immersed in water, his throat was dry. He was trapped, trapped beyond all hope, and all because of a skinny, drunken tramp, a half man, whom he could break with one hand. He was a fool for not having done so!

The day was fading at last; but the relief he felt was extinguished suddenly and completely. Men were coming along the river bank. He didn't dare raise his head to look. All that he could do was to wait.

Nearer and nearer they approached slowly, their very lack of haste indicating that they were no casual passers-by. They were searchers. He could hear them speak his name, and they coupled threats with it.

At last they stood on the bank of the pond.

"Come on!" said a voice. "It's getting dark. We'll have to hurry!"

After an eternity he could no longer hear their voices or the crashing of bushes. Then he raised his head and vomited. Under the strain, he had pulled his head under the stagnant water.

The fact that they had looked directly at him, and had not seen him, gave him hope. There was but one chance—a slight one. To be lynched would end that chance.

He had studied men all his life. He had made his living and become wealthy by out-guessing other men. So long as his case could be brought before a jury, there might

be a margin—an exceedingly thin margin—of safety. He had money. He could take appeals, bring about delay, clog the machinery of justice. He could retain the best attorneys in the country. He would spend every cent he had and mortgage all his property that he might be allowed to live.

Premeditation would be difficult to prove, and he might escape conviction for first degree murder. For killing Gabe White he might have to spend his life in a cell, but that was preferable to dancing at the end of a rope.

The best attorneys! The Snake Feeder was an attorney—a good one. Wilson would give him that, even if the fellow had made him a murderer. He might even employ the Snake Feeder to help him. Those lawyers would do anything for a big fee, and he would make the fee so large that it could not be refused.

But first he would have to get to the jail. That was the answer. If he couldn't get to the jail, all the lawyers in the world would be unable to do anything for him.

Down under the willows it was very dark, but suddenly the blackness was illuminated by an inspiration that meant sanctuary behind strong bricks and stout steel bars!

It was only with the greatest difficulty that he repressed the impulse to start immediately. It would not be safe to make the attempt until late in the evening. The penalty for failure was too great. Nor could he trust himself to judge the time. He would wait until he heard the ten o'clock Toledo passenger train roar by.

He fought with a stupor that was stealing over him, impelling him to slip back into the slime and ooze and let the waters close above him. His life had been full of chances, and he had played a shoe string too often to quit now.

In the distance there was a noise which rapidly grew in volume. The train! The time was at hand.

He had to try several times before he could move at all. His muscles were almost useless, his joints seemed rusted. Near the bank he slipped and fell, but grasped a projecting root and saved himself. The violent wrench served to clear his faculties, and at last he found himself out of the water.

Working his way along cautiously, he reached the lumber yard. Hearing voices, he staggered behind a pile of boards, every nerve tense, his tumultuous heart beating

audibly—or, at least, so he believed. Straining his ears, he caught words and phrases. They were not his pursuers, but only hoboes waiting for a freight train.

He didn't dare to expose himself. Fearing that a suddenly breaking stick would betray him, instead of walking upright, he crawled, rooting his way through the rotting, evil-smelling sawdust.

Then he dropped into a ditch and stopped to listen. Everything was quiet.

To cross the river by the bridge was too risky. His body rebelled at more cold water, but he drove himself into the stream and waded to the opposite bank. There were no houses in the neighborhood, but he could see the lights of the waterworks, which reminded him once more of the need for caution.

By direct route he had only a few blocks to go, but he approached his objective by a long circle, taking advantage of every possible bit of cover. That territory had been his playground as a boy, and he knew every inch of it.

At last he approached a small, rusty green cottage that stood behind a crazy picket fence. Searching along the back fence, he found the gate, slipped through, and knocked cautiously at the rear door.

An aged woman with reddened eyes opened it. She started back in fright at the apparition standing there.

"Will!" he whispered.

"Come in, my son!" she replied.

Wilson, a sickening thing, entered, and fell sobbing and moaning at her feet. Dirty and disgusting as he was, she drew his head into her lap and crooned to him. He had neglected her, ignored her; he was a murderer, but she was his mother.

It was through her that the details of his escape were learned later—how he had hidden in the pond, and had even considered retaining the Snake Feeder to defend him.

The mob had called at her home, had searched it thoroughly, and had gone away. They had not expected to find him there, because everybody knew that Will Wilson had not been near his mother in years, although he was an only son. He had been too busy gambling, raking in the dollars, to bother with one who still believed there was a God in heaven.

Holding him to her, she told him how she had feared for him; how every time a shouting crowd went by she had pressed her face to the window, dreading that they would

be dragging something, and that that inanimate thing would be her baby, the man whom she was clasping to her tired old body.

He told her of his desire to get to the county jail. She agreed with him that jail would be his only safety—that bars of steel alone could protect him from the fury that was raging in Unionville. She could keep watch for him, he said. As soon as the mob dispersed, he would sneak up the alleys to the red brick structure across the street from the Baptist church.

That would be too dangerous, she held—the searchers might come back. They would wait until she was sure—she would go out and make sure—that the pack was working far away from her house. Then he could walk through the streets, right under the eyes of Unionville, to safety.

Wilson drew back in terror. Walk through the streets of Unionville? Not by a damned sight! He wasn't any coward, but he had no intention of committing suicide. If he had believed that doing the Dutch was the only way out, he would have done it back in that pond, where it was easy and painless. A hundred, two hundred, a thousand pairs of hands were waiting to tie a rope around his neck, and every street in Unionville was shaded its entire length by big trees.

No, the alley route, dangerous though it might be, was the safest. The alleys were not lighted. There was no moon. He had less than a mile to go. He could make it.

Then his mother unfolded the scheme that had come to her while she was tortured by the thought that at any moment he might be torn to pieces by maddened human beings. In her old tin-covered trunk there was a black silk dress. Will Wilson's father had given it to her long before he died, and she had worn it just once—at his funeral. She was keeping it for one other occasion—the time when she herself would be dressed for the narrow house.

Now it would serve to save her boy from the grave. In that dress, and wearing one of her caps, nobody would see him as Will Wilson, but merely as a well clothed, harmless old woman—an old woman walking along the street with another old woman, for she would go with him, to see that no harm came to him.

Shutting her son in her room, she went outside and chopped some wood. The fire built, she heated water, that he might



cleanse himself. She even hunted up his father's razor, so that he could remove all traces of black beard.

When he was clean, and his courage was restored to a certain extent, she dressed him carefully. Satisfying herself that no prowlers were lurking about the house, they stepped outside together.

On the street, Will Wilson's nerve deserted him so completely that he did not need to simulate age. Under the arc lights his manhood failed him, and years thrust themselves upon him. His feet dragged, and his hands seemed to be palsied.

His mother linked her arm in his, and led him the weary journey to the sheriff's office. A deputy answered the bell.

"I want to see Mr. John Price," she said tremulously.

The deputy called the sheriff.

"Your son isn't here, Mrs. Wilson," said Price, astonished when he saw that the late visitors were two old women.

"I have brought him," answered the mother simply.

Will Wilson stepped through the big steel door with a sigh of relief.

"I can depend on you, ma'am, not to tell anybody he's here?" said the sheriff.

The mother nodded her promise. She couldn't speak; but a great load was off her mind. Her baby was safe!

## XVII

THE Snake Feeder had no part in the excitement caused by the murder of Gabriel White, nor did Dr. Eastend. All through the night, while the mob sought Will Wilson, the doctor was at the bedside of the Snake Feeder in his room in the St. George. He had been stricken with another attack, and it was only the skill of the physician, coupled with the constitution of the sick man, that saved him.

"He's tougher than iron root," said the doctor. "I got the call about five in the afternoon, and it was midnight before I knew whether I had a dead man on my hands or not. Wouldn't help me a damned bit, either. No resistance at all. Said he didn't care whether he lived or died; but when I gave him the devil for wasting my time, he bucked up a little. He's going out like a match in the wind one of these days!"

Despite the narrowness of his escape, the Snake Feeder, looking wan and weary, but fairly cheerful, was on the streets before the funeral of Gabriel White was held, and

while Unionville was still puzzling over the mysterious disappearance of Will Wilson. Bloodhounds had been brought from Lima, and had taken the scent from some of Wilson's underclothing. They picked up his trail easily in the alley, and followed it to the railroad tracks and to the river bank. From a willow clump they ran to the green pool. There the soft mud still held the imprint of a footprint identified as Wilson's.

Picking up the scent again, the dogs had followed it to the sawmill, and from there to the river bank, where they lost it. After they had followed the same route several times, the conclusion was reached that he had gone first to the sawmill and then to the pool, and, believing it impossible to escape, had drowned himself.

The next step, logically, was to drag the pool. This was done thoroughly, but no body was found. Afterward some one thought of taking the dogs across the river; but though they ran up and down the bank, yelping, they found no trail. There was a thick oil scum on the water, and a margin, as if the river had fallen, on the bank. That was perhaps the cause of the failure of the dogs.

Baffled, the searchers reached the belief that Wilson had not crossed the river, but had waded upstream until a bend brought the railroad track near the bank, and there he had boarded a freight train. His capture was only a matter of time, they held, as his description was in the hands of every police department in that section of the country, and he would surely be recognized.

Those who dreaded a lynching felt relieved. If he had got away, the time that would elapse before he was captured would allow feeling to die down to such an extent that he could be taken into court without violence.

John Lucas, however, did not share the belief that Wilson was no longer in Unionville. He refused to go home, declaring that he intended to remain in town until Wilson was found. When the dogs failed, he persisted, even after other members of the posse gave up. With a deadly intensity he searched alone, lumbering about streets and alleys, entering barns, crawling under strings of cars in the freight yards, and poking sticks into holes too small to shelter even a cat. Growing more and more melancholy with failure, his face lighted up only once, and that was when he was chasing the Red Man.

Wright brought the trouble upon himself. He had been drinking, and was contumaciously unwise. He disputed some of the virtues that were popularly ascribed to the dead marshal. The chief of police of Sandusky was a better officer than Gabriel White, he declared.

John Lucas heard the remark. With a roar, the giant plowed his way toward the Red Man.

"I only meant he caught more crooks. Sandusky's a bigger town," Wright cried, as Lucas reached for him. "I—"

Because of the look on Lucas's face, he didn't wait to finish the sentence. Crossing the street in a couple of bounds, he faced the hitching rack barrier. This he cleared with six inches to spare, and, without losing his stride, he ran down the street, whimpering like a distressed puppy.

Lucas, in pursuit, though delayed by having to crawl under the rack, gained steadily. Finally he was within grabbing distance; but just as he clutched at the Red Man's coat tail, a hound dog tied to the courthouse fence leaped at a cat. The Red Man skipped over the chain, but Lucas did not see it. He tripped and fell with a crash.

The Red Man put on more speed, and before Lucas could get up, he had disappeared; nor was he seen for several days. Rumor had it that he was skulking around his shack on the river bank.

Funeral services for Gabriel White were held at the First Presbyterian church. The judge was one of the pallbearers, and so was Aaron Burns, while the other four were also prominent residents of Unionville.

The casket was fairly hidden by flowers, some of them merely cuttings from house plants, others hothouse products. The floor was covered with unstrung lyres, broken columns, and other set pieces. Everybody loved Gabriel White.

The most beautiful and evidently the most expensive piece was a mystery. It was a great spray of big, long-stemmed white roses, and mingled with these fragrant blooms were fragile, delicately colored orchids—seemingly hundreds of them. Its cost must have been tremendous, and its beauty made the offerings that bore the cards of the judge and Mr. Burns, fine though they were, seem insignificant. Unionville had never seen anything like it.

The spray had come in by express on the noon train from Cleveland. Though those

who unwrapped it searched carefully, no card was found. Sorenson, the Unionville florist, when questioned by the curious, admitted that he had placed the order, but would give no further information.

The funeral was the largest that Unionville had ever had. Practically everybody turned out. Hundreds were unable to get into the church, though the aisles were filled with chairs, and every available bit of space was utilized. Men who by their awkwardness betrayed their lack of familiarity with places of worship sat in pews well forward, embarrassed and ill at ease, or stood in the rear of the gallery.

Dr. Boone preached the sermon—or, I should say, Dr. Boone tried to preach it. From an oratorical point of view it was the poorest funeral sermon Unionville ever heard. Hardly a sentence was completed, and when the old minister tried to put into words what the town thought of Gabriel White, he broke down completely. With tears streaming down his cheeks, he stood in front of the pulpit until he bowed his fine gray head on his arms and sobs shook his frail body. The whole church cried with him, openly and unashamed. It was the finest tribute the town had ever paid any one.

Nor was there a prayer by Dr. Boone at the conclusion. When he had recovered somewhat, he raised his hands and started, but only his lips moved. Those in the church dropped to their knees—Protestants, Catholics, and two Jews—and waited silently, reverently, until Mr. Fordham, of the Disciples church, started "Our Father." I suppose only in heaven will that prayer ever be spoken more sincerely.

When the judge and the other pallbearers, their hats in their free hands, carried the coffin out into the bright sunshine, they passed a big man kneeling on the brown grass. He had not tried to enter, but had knelt there during the entire service. Clean, sober, shaved, dressed in a new black suit, John Lucas was honoring the man who had conquered him.

Until the hearse began its slow journey toward the silent acre to the east, he remained there. Then he rose. A dozen persons, some of whom wouldn't have spoken to him before, offered him places in their carriages, but he declined all their offers. Bareheaded, he fell in behind the hearse, and, with his eyes on the dust, he walked to the cemetery.

After the services at the grave, it developed why Unionville loved Gabriel White so earnestly. His death unlocked lips that had been sealed by promises. Not only had he been an upright, incorruptible, fearless guardian, but under the seal of strictest secrecy he had performed countless deeds of charity, had extended help when assistance was needed, but when pride prevented the need from becoming known. Nor was that all.

Men looked up to in Unionville made confessions, and gave to this humble officer of the law credit for whatever success they had attained. Men whom none suspected of even thoughts of wrongdoing told of words that he had spoken with such earnestness that they made the right path as clear as day. Dewey, Squank, and I recalled the Sorenson affair, and how Gabriel White had taught us our lesson. Coupled with this was vivid remembrance of that day when I had stood outside the circus tent until he took me in.

Indeed, Will Wilson's bullet had caused Unionville a terrible loss.

### XVIII

JOHN LUCAS went directly from the cemetery to the South Side. Dewey, Squank and I believed that his expression of grief would take the form of a spree memorable even for him, now that he had apparently decided that further search for Will Wilson was useless.

We were mistaken, however. Lucas did not enter any saloons, though he traveled the length of the South Side. Here and there he singled out a man from the milling mass, took him to one side, and talked to him long and earnestly. Those whom he had addressed sought out others, and talked to them confidentially until they nodded assent.

Impelled by something we could not explain clearly to ourselves, Dewey, Squank, and I hurried through our suppers and met on the South Side, taking up a post of observation, just as we did when we passed bills. The saloons were doing a terrific business, and no one thought to close them. Mayor Valley was not to be seen, and Orrie Smith, now town marshal, was not patrolling the street.

Despite all the drinking, there was a strange silence, men speaking in tones only a little above a whisper. Usually heavy drinking brought yells and songs, quarrels

and fights; but to-night there was no noise, no laughter, no singing, no strife. Unionville was taking its liquor in a way that bespoke something sinister.

Hour by hour the tenseness that was in the air increased. Dewey, Squank, and I wandered aimlessly around the square. We were waiting for something that we could not put into words; yet we knew what held us, just as we knew why there was silence in the drinking places. So did everybody else, though the knowledge was not shouted—it had not been communicated directly to us.

Wilson had been found!

Confirmation came to us from Tom Spiers. John Lucas was the one who had tracked him down. Without sleeping, he had searched and watched. Early in the morning he had acquired the knowledge that he desired, but he had not revealed it until Gabriel White was in his grave.

"Where is Wilson?" inquired Dewey chatteringly.

"In jail," replied Tom. "Lucas hasn't told how he found him, but he swears that he's there."

Just then some one called to Tom, and he disappeared.

Suddenly little knots of men who had been standing along the street focused at Will Wilson's stairway, dark and silent now. Others came out of the saloons. A clock started to strike twelve. John Lucas, over whose right arm was a coil of new Manila rope, gave a signal. There was a tramp of feet, and a disorganized mass, over which there hung an odor of whisky, moved toward the jail.

Dewey, Squank, and I, our hearts thumping, fell in at the rear. As we did so, we encountered Tom Spiers.

My feelings were so turbulent that I could not separate them into conscious reactions. My teeth clicked and my nerves twitched wildly, despite all my efforts to control myself. I was about to witness a lynching!

The wretch who was to be hanged was a murderer, but still the thought that human life was about to be deliberately taken, unsteadied me. The very silence of that crowd was terrible. Apparently nothing could stop them. They were moving on as irresistibly as time itself.

"The judge!" gasped Tom Spiers, as the mob was about to turn into the street that led toward the jail. "The judge! Only



man in town—should have thought before—I'll get him!"

Lowering his head, he charged up the hill. We started with him, but after a few steps, as if drawn by a giant magnet, we returned and followed the mob.

It was a bright, frosty, starlight night. The trees were silhouetted against the sky. I was in Unionville, yet it was not Unionville—not the Unionville in which I had been born and had grown up. Things were real, yet unreal.

The mob halted at the jail. There was conversation in low tones, and I caught the flash of bottles. The odor of whisky grew stronger. Some one laughed foolishly, and there were whispered orders to "shut up."

No lights came from the windows of the jail. Evidently Sheriff Price thought that his secret was safe, and an attack was not anticipated. He and his deputies were probably sleeping soundly in their beds, and the turnkey was drowsing in a dimly lit corridor.

The mob tensed for a rush.

The big steel door creaked, and Sheriff Price stepped outside, the door closing behind him with a bang. The rifle he had carried in the Civil War was in his hands, and the light night wind tumbled his long gray hair.

"Stand back!" he ordered steadily. "Will Wilson is in my custody, and there'll be no lynching as long as I'm sheriff!"

"Give us the dirty devil, or we'll take him!" shouted Lucas, leaping out in front, the arc light shining full on his flushed face.

"You don't get him while I'm alive," responded the sheriff calmly. "The first man that sets foot on that there grass gets a slug of lead through his heart!"

He meant it. His eyes said so. He had faced death in battles, and was not to be cowed by a mob. To get Will Wilson meant shooting.

The mob drew back for a conference. Again there was the flash of bottles.

"I can't find the judge," panted a voice behind me. Tom Spiers had returned. "He isn't at Burns's house, and his office is locked. Have they got Wilson yet?"

"No—the sheriff is holding them off. Says he'll kill the first man off the walk."

"I'll try again," said Tom, and slipped away.

The mob made an impatient movement, as if restraint was slackening. The sheriff

raised his rifle slightly and stood immovable, fearless of the onslaught that was inevitable now.

Again that nervous, uneasy laughter—hoots—yells—pandemonium. A bright something hissed through the air, struck the high white forehead of the sheriff fairly, and shattered. He dropped as steers drop when struck with the sledge of the butcher.

The mob surged forward, only to wash back again. Another man was on the stairway, guarding the door, though weaponless. It was the Snake Feeder.

"Men!" he shouted. "In the name of the law, disperse and return to your homes!"

The command, together with astonishment, stilled the tumult. In the quietness, the body of the sheriff was removed by men whom I did not know. Then there was fretting and snarling and the heavy smell of whisky. The Snake Feeder stood, framed in the doorway, until he sensed that the pack was straining at the leash.

In terse, forceful sentences he showed them that he was no partisan of the man they sought; that he was standing for the law, which protected them and their children; that they were not avenging Gabriel White, but were smearing their hands with blood.

Seeing that there was no response to his pleading, he threw all his force into his argument, until his words struck like blows. They were disgracing themselves, their children. They were disgracing their city. Things like this are not forgotten, they are written into the histories of communities.

The law, he went on, has a fit punishment for the crime of murder. Possibly some standing there in the street witnessed what Will Wilson had done. They could go into court and testify against him. Why make themselves breakers of the law?

"If Gabriel White were alive, he'd be standing here beside me, helping to save this jail from assault," cried the Snake Feeder. "He—"

A disturbance drowned out the rest of the sentence, a pushing and jostling, an oath, and the smashing of a bottle on the sidewalk.

"I'll fix the damned—" said a thick voice.

A shot shattered the stillness of the night. The Snake Feeder sank slowly, his body sliding down the steel door, his fingers clutching uselessly at the casing.

As if the shot was the signal, a yelling mass swept forward and over the prostrate man to the barrier. From inside the jail came a bleating sound. The prisoners were voicing terror so great that it was inarticulate. They knew who was being sought, and their overwhelming fear was that in the confusion an error might be made.

An impact of many bodies against steel—a recession of the human wave—cursing and shouts. The better to defend his jail, Sheriff Price had locked the door behind him.

"A sledge!" screamed Lucas.

One was passed to him.

Tearing off his coat, his shirt, and even his underwear, the giant stood for a second or so naked to the waist, great bulges of muscle knotting his arms. Raising the heavy implement as if it were a toy, he swung it with such force that it whistled through the air, and the blow struck with a mighty crash.

Again that chorus of bleats—louder now!

"More room!" he demanded, spitting on his hands and bracing himself for another swing.

Men edged back, revealing the Snake Feeder, silent, his clothing blood-soaked, lying on the sidewalk. Careless of danger to himself, Tom Spiers darted forward, and, gathering the Snake Feeder into his arms, disappeared in the darkness.

Once more Lucas struck like a pile driver, and those pitiful bleats were like an echo of the clang of steel on steel; but the door held.

Stopping only to wipe the perspiration from his forehead with his great left paw, Lucas pounded at the obstruction until his breath whistled through his teeth.

And after every blow those bleats!

He rested for a few moments. Volunteers would have relieved him, but he waved them aside. With expert eye he sought a vantage point. The sledge described its arc, and a shout went up from the mob. The door was giving way at last!

While it was still held by one hinge, men poured through the opening. The bleats changed to yells of terror. The name of the Savior was called again and again, coupled with pleas for mercy.

Perspiring despite the chilliness, numb with horror, Dewey, Squank, and I waited.

Out of the doorway fell a group of men. They were dragging something, all black, save for a blob of white, and, unheeding

screams of anguish, they were kicking that white mass.

Shouting triumphantly, they dragged the thing that was once a man across the street to the churchyard. Some one threw the end of Lucas's rope over the limb of a tall maple. For an instant Will Wilson, insensate, limp, was upright, held so on the fence by many hands, while the rope was twisted about his neck and the knot tied. Then those hands pushed.

I can still hear the sound of heels kicking against wooden pickets.

## XIX

CREEPING into the house with all the caution I possessed, I found my room without turning on a light. I heard the gentle breathing of my mother, the light snoring of my father, and the loud, irregular, explosive snoring of my grandfather. They did not know what had happened less than a dozen blocks away, and I envied them their ignorance.

I tossed about on the bed. When I closed my eyes, something came between the starlight and me—a twisting, writhing thing with arms bound to its sides. Bleats aroused me from relieving moments of drowsing.

Each time the clock struck, it startled me into more complete and wearying wakefulness. I was tempted to get up and dress, and, by attempting to read, to turn my mind to other things; but that would be so contrary to precedent that I would surely be questioned. I had to lie tortured until my mother called me at the regular time.

I dawdled as usual, thoughts of breakfast nauseating me, but the family was not at the table. The cream had not been delivered. For the first time in years and years, mother had not found it beside the door. It was evident that something had happened to Nick Barnes.

Just as mother decided that we would drink our coffee black, we heard him on the rear porch.

"What makes you late?" asked mother, handing him the empty pail.

"Hear about the lynchin'?" he demanded in return.

"What lynching?"

Mother's voice showed how startled she was.

Gratified at being able to furnish information, Barnes returned a liberal answer. He had all the details. Lots of folks hadn't

heard about it, and that was the reason for his delay.

"Naw, I didn't see it," he continued, smiling broadly. "Didn't even hear about it till I was hitchin' up. 'Low as how you won't find a man in Unionville to-day that did see it, neither. 'Low Will Wilson jest nachally lynched hisself, though they's a lot of Unionville folks that's sleepin' late this mornin'!"

He was still grinning when he returned to his wagon.

The table conversation was all on one subject. I could hardly keep up the pretext of eating. I needed air. Then Squank and Dewey came, and I was free to depart.

They were gray and hollow-eyed. They, too, had been unable to sleep. Their reactions were the same as mine in all the essential details. Much of this was conveyed to me by the silences that fell on us. We did not want to talk about the horror; but when a newsboy offered us an extra edition of the *Daily News*, we bought it and read the story from beginning to end. Compared to that which was in our minds, though there was a wealth of detail, the story was blurry and fuzzy.

Without conscious direction from our brains, and with no verbal agreement, our feet carried us to the City Hall, where the paper said the body was lying, waiting for the coroner's jury. Streams of men were going to the long room on the second floor—a room always permeated with the odor of horses, for the stalls of the fire teams were just below, and their kicking and stamping often interrupted the solemn sessions of the council. None of the men we had seen the night before were among the curious.

We stopped in front of the engine house. Those who came down were commenting on the bloated, blackened face, the twisted features, the cut in the neck made by the rope. We did not go up.

Passing the east side of the square, we hurriedly walked south until we crossed the river and passed a rusty green cottage, from the front door of which crape was fluttering. Dr. Eastend's buggy was at the gate, and neighbors were going into the house. Again our guidance had been subconscious. We fled the neighborhood of the home of Will Wilson's mother.

The inquest was held at noon. To our relief, Dewey, Squank, and I were not called as witnesses. Neither was Tom

Spiers or the Snake Feeder. Within twenty minutes after assembling, the jury had rendered its verdict. Apparently, as Nick Barnes had said, Will Wilson had hanged himself. The verdict of the jury was that "he came to his death at the hands of persons unknown."

Tom Spiers told us that he had carried the Snake Feeder to the hospital, a few blocks from the jail. How badly the poor fellow was hurt he did not know. Dr. Eastend was in the building on another case, and he had taken charge, while Tom had returned to the jail.

We went to see the Snake Feeder, but the nurse refused to admit us to the room. The bullet had grazed the top of his left lung, and the wound was not necessarily fatal, but he had lost a great deal of blood. That was the explanation the nurse gave us as she motioned for us to leave. She spoke in a whisper.

The sheriff was again at the jail, though not attending to his duties. Against his will he had been put to bed, as he was suffering from a slight concussion. A deputy gave us that information. Men from the Victor Iron Works had already replaced the steel door and daubed it with red paint. The idly curious superintended the work, and at its completion hung around the jail yard.

The limb of the maple into which the rope had sawed was hacked away by souvenir hunters, and late comers even cut off other branches. The pickets that Will Wilson had kicked loose were gone also.

Late in the afternoon, Dewey, Squank, and I separated. I thought I would go home and lie down, but I went to Mamie Merrill's instead.

"I know—you saw it," she said, as soon as she glimpsed my face.

"My head aches," I replied.

She wet one of her small linen handkerchiefs, one with blue forget-me-nots in the corner, and placed it on my forehead. The pain vanished, but it wasn't the cloth—it was the touch of her little white fingers on my temples.

I tried to tell her of the night before.

"Don't!" she said, shuddering, and placing her hands over her eyes.

"I couldn't sleep," I mumbled.

"Poor boy!" she said, and sat close beside me.

The tension relaxed. I found comparative peace.



While she was comforting me in her sweet, womanly way, they buried Will Wilson. There were no pallbearers and no mourners. The mother who had led him to the jail for safe-keeping was gravely ill—too ill to ride to the cemetery, so ill that she did not know that her boy was being taken there. At nine o'clock that night she died. Dr. Eastend, driving rapidly up the street, paused long enough to shout the information to my father.

The mob had claimed two victims!

At midnight Dr. Eastend rapped at our door until father was awakened. I could not hear what was said, but father came up the stairs quickly and called me.

Rubbing the sleep from my eyes, I dressed hastily and went with the doctor. The Snake Feeder was dying, he said.

## XX

THE Snake Feeder did not know me as I tiptoed into the room behind Dr. Eastend. He was wide awake, but there was a strange look in his eyes, and he was muttering incoherently.

"Delirious," said the doctor. "Bad sign! Afraid of pneumonia. No chance, then. Has lucid moments. Asked for you. I drove like hell. Horse tired, too. Might forget he wanted you, but if he remembers, and you aren't here—don't want him agitated. Who would shoot a dead man?"

The doctor looked at me with tired eyes. I shook my head.

"Damn mobs! Uncivilized. Lost one patient already to-night."

Drawing a great gold watch from his vest pocket, he held it in his left hand while he counted the Snake Feeder's pulse.

"Damn it, another night gone! Babies—lynchings—no sleep for a week. How do they expect a doctor to keep going? Can't leave him. About one-half of one chance. Where does he get that vitality? Sit down."

I took the stiff, straight chair beside the bed, and the doctor dropped into a rocker. The Snake Feeder's breathing was irregular. I leaned over as his lips moved, and I thought he repeated a name.

"No sleep for a week. Day and night for seven days. Damn it!"

The doctor's head gradually sank lower and lower, until his long, flowing beard was a pillow for his chin. His eyes closed and his breathing became regular. I fought off a drowsy feeling that was overcoming me.

"Song of the river," mumbled the Snake Feeder. "Melody in a monotone—peace." I came to with a start.

"Drink, doctor! Water!"

Dr. Eastend's eyes flew open with a snap. "Wasn't asleep," he declared. "Just relaxing."

"I'll get it," I responded.

The doctor motioned toward the carafe on the table. I half filled a glass and held it to the lips of the Snake Feeder. For an instant his eyes were clear, and then the wild look returned.

"Judge Browne!" he called in a loud voice, raising himself partially. "I submit in the case of—"

"Bah!" ejaculated the doctor, getting up stiffly. "No sleep for a week. Have to quiet him before he burns up what little strength he's got. Need it all before this night's through!"

He mixed something in a glass, and tried to make the Snake Feeder drink it.

"Your honor," broke in the Snake Feeder, pushing the glass to one side and spilling the contents, "I have here the matter of an accounting—"

Dr. Eastend had mixed another glass, and, lifting the Snake Feeder's head, in some manner he made him drink it.

A woman in uniform came into the room. "Never mind, nurse," said the doctor gently. "I'll stay the rest of the night. You sleep!"

"But, doctor—"

"Sleep—damn it, sleep! I'm as fresh as a daisy, and not another thing to do. You've been working more than forty-eight hours now. Too much! You'll lose your value. No back talk—get to bed!"

She went out, her footfalls making no sound.

"No nurses in Unionville! Damn it, expect a woman to work her head off! That girl's dead on her feet."

Glancing at the quiet Snake Feeder, he sat down again. He no sooner touched the cushion than he began to snore gently.

I could hear the ticking of his watch grow fainter and fainter.

"I'm the Snake Feeder," rambled the man on the bed, just as I was crossing the boundary line between sleep and wakefulness. "Harmless old Snake Feeder. Get drunk. Sleep on the river bank. What difference does it make? Gentlemen of the jury—whisky straight, yes. An anodyne, yes. What town is this?"

The question was so clear that I answered it.

"Unionville? In the case of the people against Swope *et al.*—Judge Browne on the bench. Your honor!" He laughed unnaturally. "*Your honor*, they must not lynch Wilson!"

He almost leaped out of bed before I could catch him. I lowered him gently, the touch of his hands almost burning me; but he did not resist, and in another moment his eyes closed.

Dr. Eastend, in his relaxation, looked so worn that I did not call him. There seemed to be no necessity, unless there was another outbreak.

I heard late sounds. Sand roughened my eyelids. I felt myself slipping, slipping.

"I'm glad you came."

The voice was faint, but consciousness returned to me with a snap. The Snake Feeder was rational.

"Guess I'm going this time," he whispered with obvious effort. "The packet—don't forget. Look at it, then burn it. There is—"

His voice changed to a mutter. Straining, I waited for another moment of lucidity. Dr. Eastend opened his eyes.

"On guard? Good! Call me!"

Silence and a feeling as of being whirled about in space.

"Hold me back!" pleaded the Snake Feeder.

I sought one of his burning hands.

"Just at the edge of manhood. Don't let anything twist your life!"

He stopped, but clung to my fingers. Apparently he was resting.

"Made a mistake—the packet will tell." His labored breathing destroyed his sentences. "Hate—vengeance at last—destroy snake!"

Suddenly his voice cleared.

"What stopped me?" he asked resonantly. "The little brick church with the windows. The church with a face—a face in the house of God. I prayed—I hadn't prayed for years!"

His head snapped back. He panted.

"In all of God's world—only one friend—three boys—river bank. Unionville—Gilbert Browne—my knife!"

Releasing my hand, he tried to feel under the pillow.

"I'll catch that thief," he babbled impotently. "I tracked him down. Mercy? Bah! Drink!"

I gave him water, and his eyes closed. Dr. Eastend stirred.

"Don't waken him. He's—"

The voice trailed off into nothing.

"Something's stabbing me in the lungs," he complained. "I hear—*Helen!*"

He shouted the name, and gasped.

With a bound I jumped to the doctor's chair and shook him.

"He's dying!" I cried.

The doctor leaped to his feet. In a flash his stethoscope was over the heart of the Snake Feeder, and he listened, his forehead contracting in his concentration. Throwing his instrument to one side, he jerked open his medicine case and took out some little vials.

"Brandy!" he ordered tersely, pointing to a squat bottle on the table.

I handed it to him, and he filled a hypodermic syringe. Baring the Snake Feeder's wandlike arm, he inserted the needle.

Slowly the inert form on the bed assumed animation. The doctor's eyes never left the Snake Feeder's face, as if he would keep his patient alive by the very force of his will. Nor did the strain end until the wounded man's lips moved.

"Close! Too close!" croaked the doctor, after an anxious interval. "Damn it, what a constitution!"

The weariness seemed gone from the physician, and his movements were alert and vigorous, as we heard the breathing of the Snake Feeder again.

"Nothing to do but to wait now. Too late for you to go home. Might need you. I'm rested. You catch a few winks of sleep. Take my chair." He looked at his watch. "Damn it, only half past one!"

I stumbled clumsily over to the rocker. I would not sleep, but would be on the alert if an alarm came. I would not be in the doctor's way there.

But not until my body felt the ease of that cushion did I know the meaning of fatigue. It was my second night of wakefulness, and nature was insistent.

I felt a light touch on my wrist, and my eyes flew open. The room was in darkness, and for a second or so I could not orient myself. Then I heard Dr. Eastend whispering to me:

"There's an empty bed down the hall. Get in there and rest."

"The Snake Feeder?" I asked.

"Passed the crisis at two o'clock. Be-

gan to sweat. Asleep now. Has a chance. Don't need you. I'll stay until the nurse comes on at six. Come along!"

Piloting me through the hall, he led me to a vacant room.

"Damn it!" he muttered, as he felt around for the light. "No sleep for a week. Doctor can't close his eyes; but I jerked this fellow back. Damn a whale's backbone, but I did—with the help of God!"

It was noon before I awakened. I would have slept longer, but the odor of food crept into my nostrils.

"You can't see him," said the nurse, when I stopped at the Snake Feeder's door, after having learned what a real delight cold water applied to one's face and eyes can be. "Dr. Eastend says he must be kept quiet for a long time."

"Where's the doctor?" I asked stupidly.

"Operating," she replied shortly. "Mrs. Petralis was brought in with appendicitis just as I came on duty."

### XXI

SPRING! The winged seeds of the maples, dropping before they ripened, littered the sidewalks. The river banks were walls of green willows. Over everything was a clean, sweet smell, and in the wind one felt both a caress and a call.

The Snake Feeder, walking with a cane, his body almost nothing, his face bloodless, was out again. Hour after hour he sat on the front porch of the St. George, his feet on the railing, looking at nothing. Several times a day he would hobble to the Good Luck and remain there for hours. As if the shot that had struck him down had severed all connection with Unionville, he remained aloof. He spoke to us, but never chatted or smiled.

Shortly after the Snake Feeder was able to walk around, having spent the entire winter in the hospital, Dr. Eastend began driving a new storm front buggy and a fine team.

"Gift from a patient," he explained succinctly. "Can't collect enough in this town to buy pants buttons. Have to take charity. Not worth while keeping books. Work my fool head off. Never get any sleep. Damn it!"

Frank Valley was no longer mayor of Unionville, but was laboring at the Victor Iron Works ten hours a day. His fancy

vest was replaced by greasy overalls, and his soft hands were hard and calloused. He went about town as if he was afraid of something, and was never seen on the South Side. At the election following the murder of Gabriel White he had met the most ignominious defeat ever suffered by a candidate on the Republican city ticket in Unionville.

Orrie Smith, who ran for marshal in Gabriel White's place, was decisively defeated by Emerson Lee. There were those who blamed Orrie for the lynching of Will Wilson. Though he went all over town for days after, explaining that he hadn't known anything about the mob, and had remained at home because one of his children was ill, no one believed him.

It was a bad year for the Republicans. Even Howard Hamilton, elected prosecuting attorney for so many years that he looked on the office as a life job, went down with his ticket.

Only the judge escaped, and his majority was much smaller than it had been at the election two years before. Not that the feeling which had caused the others to be repudiated had affected the judge personally, but a great number, fearing to risk spoiling their ballots by splitting their tickets, had voted the Democratic ticket straight. Their wish was to register emphatic disapproval of an administration that had permitted Unionville to be disgraced.

It was true that the judge had made no attempt to avert the lynching, though it had been within his power to do so; but he was not required to furnish an alibi for his absence that night. Immediately after Gabriel White's funeral he had gone to Bellefontaine, to speak at a Republican rally in the evening, the invitation having been extended weeks before. The files of the *Daily News* were proof of that—Tom Spiers encountered the item in going through them at the library, while checking up the bank's small advertisement.

The judge no longer lived with Aaron Burns. He had not rebuilt his house, but just after Thanksgiving he rented the office adjoining the one that he still maintained in the Moore block, though he had taken no private cases after his election to the bench. This he furnished, and there he lived alone, the janitor looking after it for him, as Martha Green was no longer his housekeeper.

Up on the hill, the poison ivy vines were



sending out shoots which, before the summer was over, would cover the mound of charred timbers and broken bricks, all that remained of the judge's residence.

Martha Green went from house to house, doing washing. Tuesday was my mother's day. Early in the morning Martha would come, dressed neatly in black, with her working dress and shoes in a bundle under her arm. Hour after hour she would rub and wring, without speaking a word, unless directly addressed. Tight-lipped, almost sullen, she bent silently over her tubs, a smoldering fire in her eyes.

The Red Man spent his days in idleness, mingling with loafers on the South Side, his breath redolent of whisky. He always had money. His woman furnished it. She did not go from house to house, but nevertheless she was a competitor of Martha Green. Down in the shack on the river bank she drudged over the washings the Red Man brought home in the little express wagon that he towed about the streets. Cleaned, starched, and ironed, he returned them to the places where they belonged, and collected her earnings. That explained his financial resources.

Spiders worked unmolested in Will Wilson's stairway. Ever since the shooting of Gabriel White the gambling room had been deserted, and still all efforts to rent it for any purpose whatever were futile.

No one wanted it. Dust was thick over the tables, the walls, and the floors. The negro who used to keep it clean and serve the free liquor on Saturday night left Unionville suddenly on the day of the crime, and was never seen there again.

Apparently the Snake Feeder and the judge made no effort to avoid meeting, but they never encountered each other. Whenever they passed, the street was between them.

Not so the Red Man. Whenever he saw Judge Browne coming, he got in his way deliberately, and would stand grinning contemptuously as he forced the judge to walk around him. The magistrate paid no attention to this obvious insult. To all outward appearances, the Red Man did not exist as far as he was concerned.

The Red Man's woman no longer followed him about like a spiritless dog. She was too busy; but sometimes, late in the evening, when the Red Man was drunk, noisy, and quarrelsome, she would come to the South Side and get him and take him

home. He cursed her and called her vile names, but he always went with her.

Just when the leaves were freshest in their new green, and my longing was to be with Mamie Merrill every moment, the revivals reached a climax in the Methodist church, and the Presbyterians and the Disciples had their week of prayer. Unionville seemed to be turned toward religion, and almost every pew was filled nightly.

On Thursday night of the week of prayer, a mountain of a man remained after the meeting at the First Presbyterian church, and Dr. Boone stayed with him. The next night this same man, John Lucas, got up and publicly stated that he had been wicked and sinful, but that he had had an experience that had changed the current of his life. He did not enroll as a church member, he said, because he had not yet atoned sufficiently for his sin.

Thereafter, Lucas's name stood for all that was sternly right. He sold his home on the marsh, got a job at the Victor Iron Works, moved to Unionville, and each week placed in the collection plate one-tenth of his earnings. He never went back to the South Side, and the look of happiness on the face of his wife never lessened.

At that time the African Baptists' revival, which had been going on for weeks, flamed with new intensity. Converts were many, and those who repented and confessed their sins prepared to be baptized in the "living waters."

Dewey, Squank, and I stood on the Lafayette Street bridge on the Sunday morning when the baptizing took place. The river was full, though the annual flood had not yet come down from the upper reaches; but the lowlands were covered, and the water was well up on the bridge abutments.

This, however, did not deter the shepherd of the colored flock, the Rev. Thomas Cole. His black face, glowing with fervor, shone as if it had been polished, and his eyes gleamed. He had plowed, he had sown, and he was now reaping the harvest.

The company on the bank sang their hymns resonantly, the little basso singer swelling like a pigeon as he plumbed the depths of harmony, and the huge, fat tenor reaching almost impossible high notes. "Hallelujahs" and "Amens" mingled with the chorus. The singing ended, the minister dropped on his knees on the new grass, and prayed long and earnestly. With an invitation to all who wished to be saved

to come, he waded intrepidly into the yellow stream until the waters whirled about his waist.

One by one those who were to be baptized, supported by deacons, entered the river, and were borne backward until they were completely immersed. They choked and sputtered when they came up, but they were able to voice praises to their Creator which brought glad cries from the bank.

The last one down the path—where the clay was made slippery by her dripping predecessors—was Martha Green. Unsupported—she waved the deacons aside—her head held high, her thin lips compressed, and with eyes fixed straight ahead, she marched like a soldier; but as she reached the water's edge, her body shook, and she drew back hurriedly.

"Come on, sistah!" pleaded Cole. "God will wahn the livin' watahs!"

Deacons, ever helpful, seized her arms, but she resisted. The minister waded toward her, his hands outstretched, but she shrank back farther.

"Quietude!" requested Cole.

Silence, broken only by the song of birds, fell on the group. Kneeling on the bank, he voiced a prayer, in which were interpolated "Amen," "Hallelujahs," and supplications for grace; but though he prayed until his voice was hoarse, he could not melt the hard heart of that woman.

"Come, come!" he urged. "Throw out the devil! Join the company of the saints, and shout all ovah Gawd's heaven!"

"Ah cayn't!" cried Martha.

With the words, she broke into a torrent of sobs and dropped in a faint in the mud.

Some of those already saved raised her and took her away. Another hymn was sung, and the service concluded.

Lured by the call in the spring breeze, which I felt even during the services on the river bank, I left Dewey and Squank and went to Mamie Merrill's. Never was she more alluringly lovely, never were her brown eyes brighter, and never were those pure agate glints more attractive. I was a man, within two years of finishing high school, and time after time a question sought to force itself past my lips.

Charlie Mechant and Nelly Miller drove by, and Nelly flashed a smile at us.

"I guess they are going to be married," said Mamie a little wearily.

All my resolution vanished. Wishing it was night, I moved over closer to her.

"Mamie," I began, "I wish—"

And then I couldn't go on!

"You wish what?" she asked, her brown eyes tender as lilac buds.

"I wish I could be a great lawyer," I finished, though that wasn't what I wished at all—just then.

"Oh!" she said, as I stopped. "Why do you suppose Martha Green wouldn't be baptized?"

Wasn't that just like a woman—her mind flitting off the subject like that?

"Can't say," I replied. "Don't you—"

"Negroes are so peculiar," she interrupted, a dimple showing in her chin. "I wonder if—no, that wouldn't do."

"You wonder if what?" I asked, hope rising.

"I was wondering if Maude and Squank and you and I couldn't attend one of their services. Do white people ever do that?"

I couldn't tell her, because I had no interest in the African Baptists, and hadn't investigated; but if she wished, we'd drop around there some night and find out.

"Go to-night," she advised, that dimple still showing.

"Why, Mamie!" I exploded. "To-night is my regular night."

"Yes, but you're here this afternoon. You can't come to my house twice in one day."

How could one so gentle be so cruel? No man in his senses would trade a night with his girl for an afternoon with her mother and father sitting in the next room!

"Besides, Aunt Ruth is coming home from church with us," she added.

That took the sting out. Aunt Ruth was an old maid. In her eyes all men were no good. After one experience, whenever she came to Mamie's on Sunday night, I didn't. It was better. I'll never forget that one night!

There being nothing else to do, Dewey and I formed the investigating committee that Sunday night, Squank having a date with Maude, and Dewey adhering to his resolution to remain a bachelor. We found that the two rear seats were reserved for white people, and that many we knew went there out of curiosity. The revival was to last another week.

Dewey and I looked for Martha Green. She was on the mourners' bench, sitting like a ramrod, though mourner after mourner left her and went to the altar, followed by shouts of joy and triumph. The church

fairly rocked in the emotional intensity unloosed, but Martha never moved. Mr. Cole came down from the pulpit, and, assisted by numerous volunteers, worked with her until his high white collar melted flat, but all efforts were wasted. Martha couldn't come through.

"We'll get that old devil that's in huh!" shouted the minister hoarsely.

But he didn't, that night. He was equally unsuccessful the next, and from that time on the meetings concentrated on Martha. Always when Dewey, Squank, and I dropped in, the minister and the deacons were wrestling with Martha.

On Saturday night there was to be a definite, final effort, and it was on that night that Maude and Mamie were to go with us. Dewey went along, too. You couldn't have kept him away with fire.

The little church almost bulged with the black congregation, the only vacancies being in the two rear seats, and those were filled before Mr. Cole began his sermon. It was a powerful harangue, smelling strongly of brimstone, and full of dire predictions for those hard of heart. Heaven was the delectable land, and was easy of attainment. Repentance, confession, baptism—those were the means; but for all the effect it seemed to have on Martha Green, she might have been stone.

The sermon ended, the collection taken and counted, Mr. Cole asked those who desired grace to come forward. He had plucked so many brands from the burning, however, that there was but one left. Martha Green sat alone on the mourners' bench.

Over and over the choir sang the words of a weird hymn—a hymn with a rhythm like the beat of tom-toms. Bodies swayed back and forth in time with it, and the tapping of feet was an obbligato to the organ music. Curious sounds came from the throats of those seated near the altar. In the excess of their emotionalism some of the newer converts rolled on the floor.

Mamie crouched close to me. In the dim light her hand sought mine.

The chant was becoming penetrating, uncanny; but Martha Green sat like a statue, her face a dark stone, her hands clasped in prayer, her eyes dry and smoldering. With his arm around her shoulders, kneeling by her side, the parson prayed as he had never prayed before.

Still on his knees, Mr. Cole finally made his way from her side to the altar. His

eyes, in which the whites were showing plainly, were fixed on the low ceiling of the frame structure. When he finally stopped, he prayed in a voice that shook the windows for the soul of Martha Green, for the vanquishment of the devil that was holding her back.

"Oh, Lawd! Good Lawd!" he cried, his words directed at the trap door over the pulpit, and the eyes of the congregation following his. "We've labahed and labahed, but the devil is triumphant. Give us a sign, oh, Lawd! Come down heah among us miserable sinnahs! Take the form of a dove, Lawd, and appeah among us, that this sistah may receive the evah-lastin' grace!"

The trap door opened and closed suddenly. A white bird floated over the heads of Mr. Cole's people. With mouths open and eyes staring in terror, men and women dropped to their knees.

The bird, confused, whirled for a few seconds above woolly heads, found a window that had been opened for ventilation, and disappeared in the night.

Martha screamed as if in mortal agony, and fell on her face before the pulpit.

"Ah hab done seen de sign!" she wailed. "Ah confess! It ain't mah sin, but hit's bearin' hebbly on mah heart. Christ Jesus, fohgib me! Ah'm betrayin', but de gates ob heaben must fly open!"

The minister raised her quickly.

"Confess and cleanse you' heart!" he commanded.

"Dat fiah was set."

"What fiah?"

"De fiah in de jedge's house."

"Who sot it, sistah? On you' ansah depends you' salvation!"

"De jedge!" she screamed. "De jedge done it!"

In a torrent of words, her face lemon-black, she amplified her statement. The judge said she was responsible, but she wasn't. She hadn't been smoking her pipe in the basement that day. She never smoked a pipe in his house in her life. The judge was too big a man for that. She always went into the yard. She had been ironing in the basement. While she was there, the judge came down and fussed with some papers. He didn't see her, and she didn't make any noise.

She was upstairs when the doorbell rang, but she hadn't put away the laundry. She had forgotten to, and she forgot it after



she answered the door. She heard the judge come upstairs, and right away she smelled smoke. She didn't think anything about that. The judge washed his hands at the kitchen sink, and Martha smelled kerosene.

"Cool ile," she called it.

The judge said in the paper that she set the house on fire. If the judge said she did it, she thought it was all right, because the judge was the greatest man in the world. She'd worked for him for years and years, and everybody looked up to him.

"Even you niggahs heah in de church," she added, and none disputed her.

So when the judge told her that she had been smoking, and that that was the cause of the fire, she didn't dispute him, though deep in her heart she knew it wasn't true. He didn't blame her; he told her it was just an accident.

Then she found God. She thought she could achieve her salvation and not reveal the truth, but she couldn't enter the living waters with such a sin on her conscience, such a lie in her throat.

"Ah'm only a niggah, and he's de jedge, but hit's mah immortal soul," she continued pleadingly. "An' he didn't lose all de books. He sent away a big box de night befo' de fiah. Glory!" Her shout was startling. "Ah's clean, an' Ah's ready foh de livin' watahs now!"

Her triumph ended in a quaver, and once more she fell.

"Let's go!" said Mamie in a choking whisper.

We five filed out, unheeded in the general confusion.

"Is she telling the truth?" asked Maude.

"No," answered Squank.

"What would be his object?" questioned Dewey. "The judge burn his own house! Why, that wench is crazy! That hymn they kept repeating is enough to make anybody loony."

"Wonder who's shy a pigeon?" observed Squank. "Old Cole's theology may be a bit loose, but he certainly understands negro psychology. He needed a miracle to get Martha, and the miracle arrived right on schedule!"

## XXII

It was such a wonderful night that after I left Mamie—and I didn't hurry our leaving—I strolled on down town under the

newly leafed maples. I wanted to think, and walking helped me.

Mamie filled my mind—Mamie and her adorable loveliness. She was as dainty as the spring itself, as modest as the violets, as—but I was getting poetical, which wouldn't do for a man who was to be a lawyer.

I was so happy that I was overflowing. My feelings were too wonderful to be unshared. I longed for a confidant. Dewey was out of the question. He was too cynical about women. Squank wouldn't do, either. He was too practical. Mamie Merrill, a rose mist girl, yet real, living, vital!

My mind went far into the future. A little house with warm, old-fashioned flowers in the yard, and—I glanced at the porch of Nelly Miller's house. She and Charlie were sitting there, but they didn't see me, and I saw them only through a haze. It was that kind of a night.

The Snake Feeder—I could talk to him! He would understand.

I had been neglecting the Snake Feeder lately. He seemed to be different from what he had been before he was shot—not so friendly. But maybe he didn't mean it at all. Possibly he was lonely. If I intruded a little, I might pierce his reserve and get back into my old place with him.

He seeped into my thoughts of Mamie Merrill, for he interested me—the mystery about him—the contrary streaks in his nature—getting drunk, and defending poor boys in court—carrying a knife, which was against the law, and defying a mob and getting shot in defending the law. Queer proposition, that Snake Feeder! He was indeed a riddle, the complication being increased because of the judge.

That dove incident ought to make him smile; and there was Martha Green's confession. The judge! What would he think of her accusation?

The air was just like June, and I hoped he would be on the porch of the St. George. I quickened my steps. Sure enough, he was there, his feet cocked up, his eyes fixed on nothing, his hat tilted well down.

"Hello!" I said, pausing on the walk below him.

He did not answer for what seemed like a long time.

"Hello!" he returned at last, with a jerk.

"What's the matter, Mr. Morton?" I asked.

"Snake Feeder."

"Snake Feeder, what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. Thinking."

"You're always thinking nowadays, when you're not—"

"Drinking."

"You didn't used to be so distant."

"I'm not immutable."

"What have Dewey, Squank, and I done to you?"

"Nothing. You've grown up. I haven't anything against you, Dewey, and Squank—least of all you. I've made you my executor. Come on up and sit down, if you wish. You have something on your mind."

Though rebuffed, I took the vacant chair. Persisting in my determination to resume the old contact, without any introduction I described the events of the evening, leading up to Martha Green's accusation.

"And she named—"

"The judge, of course," he supplied indifferently, utterly robbing me of my dramatic climax. "Aren't you out rather late? I feel chilled, and must go in."

I got up to leave, though I hadn't said a word about Mamie.

"I didn't mean to be rude," said the Snake Feeder quickly; "but I'm in a bad mood to-night. Seems as if that bullet took more than mere blood away from me. It's warming up, though, old man, and perhaps, when summer comes, the old Snake Feeder will come back with it. I have an idea of what is on your mind. It's the time of the year. I couldn't listen to it, though—not to-night."

The sting was gone. It was removed not solely by his words but by his tone as well. In a measure he had made me a confidant—had treated me as man to man.

If he wanted to spend the rest of the evening thinking, he was welcome to do so. Denied discussion, I wanted to do some more thinking myself. I hadn't the remotest idea of the content of his brain, but I was certain that my thoughts were far more pleasant than his. Mine were of Mamie Merrill—Mamie in her white dress, her blue sash, and her wide-brimmed straw hat on which the daisies nodded.

I dreamed of her so much that it seemed as if I had hardly closed my eyes when I smelled the breakfast coffee.

For once I was allowed to do all the talking at the breakfast table. When I ran down, I was prompted by questions.

Father, who had been down town late, because it was Saturday night, had heard something of the meeting at the African church, and of the miracle, but I had first-hand information.

Just as my family was interested, so was Unionville. The story was all over town before the church bells rang. Mrs. Doc Jimminson was the carrier in our neighborhood. We didn't need any newspapers in our district so long as she had the use of her legs and her tongue.

And the indignation the story stirred up! Everybody took the part of the judge. Martha was held to be an ingrate. She had worked for him for years, had eaten his food, had taken his wages, and had lived in his house. The idea of trying to throw suspicion on the most upright man in town!

"She ought to be tarred and feathered," declared Mrs. Petralis, now quite recovered from her experience with appendicitis, though she continually introduced it into the conversation. "If I wasn't so weak from my operation, I'd find her and give her a piece of my mind!"

"I ought to, too," affirmed Mrs. Jimminson, her eyes shooting fire. "The idea of a black hussy like that—"

Her indignation choked further utterance—temporarily.

Dewey's theory, voiced the night before, was the one in which the town concurred—Martha Green was crazy!

It is possible that the judge might have been the only person in Unionville who didn't hear the story before church time, but hardly probable, for Mrs. Jimminson had told Mrs. Aaron Burns, and Mrs. Burns had told her husband, because she told him everything.

The bank president started for the First Presbyterian Church early, and picked up the judge on the way. Curious looks were cast at the judge as he came down the aisle, respectfully preceded by the usher, who guided him with as much concern as if he hadn't been going to that same pew for years. The magistrate gave no indication that the day was other than ordinary. If he knew that he was suspected of arson, he hid the knowledge beneath the dignity that never left him.

After dinner Dewey, Squank, and I strolled aimlessly about. At Winters's corner we met Emerson Lee.

"Were you at the African church last night?" the marshal asked us.

"Sure!" answered Squank.

"Well, Herman Counter says some one stole one of his pigeons Friday night, and I've got my suspicions. Come along, and we'll see what Mr. Cole has got to say. Can't get a danged thing out of his congregation. They still believe the Lord flew into that church, and they're too scared to talk rational."

The Rev. Thomas Cole didn't attempt to evade the issue. The sight of the marshal's neat new uniform and his silver star evidently gave the preacher confidence. He had done all in his power to bring Sister Green through, he explained, but the devil in her was exceptionally hard and tough. If he didn't succeed with her, the devil would triumph, and the result of all his work in the weeks of the revival would be wasted, because doubtings would bring about backslidings.

Everything else having failed, and his prayers remaining unanswered, an inspiration came to him. What that woman needed was a sign, and no sign was forthcoming; so, under the cover of darkness, he sent his small son, whose color matched the evening well, to the Counter cote, with instructions to obtain a white dove.

"And that fool boy brung back a blue one fuhst and a yallah one second," the preacher complained. "He had to make three trips, and all the time in dangeah of gettin' cotched."

*(To be continued in the July number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)*

The recreant youth finally recovered from his color blindness sufficiently, Mr. Cole continued, to capture and carry to his father the desired emblem of purity. Before the Saturday evening service he had been stationed in the attic, and well rehearsed in the part he was to play. At the agreed signal he released the pigeon, and Martha Green came through!

"I'm no dove stealah," insisted the minister, with dignity. "Hit wasn't no sin. I only borrahd that buhd. I thought hit 'd fly back home, but hit got away on me. Heah's the fo' bits Mr. Countah says hit's wuth. My conscience is cleah, and Sistah Green is saved; but, Mr. Marshal, please keep this heah private till aftah Sunday next, as I'm baptizin' Sistah Green on that day. She's sick to-day and we had to postpone hit."

The baptizing of Sister Green was postponed indefinitely, however. She didn't wash at our house on Tuesday, and we had to find a substitute.

Instead of working in hot soap suds, she was dressed in her best clothes and was in the Probate Court, where her sanity was inquired into. That same day she was taken to the asylum at Toledo, the diagnosis of the two doctors who had examined her agreeing with the popular verdict.

Judge Browne was vindicated. He was the one who signed the petition that caused the inquiry.

## LITTLE TOWNS

MEN laugh at little towns and call them deadly dull and slow,  
And say that there the flaming truths of life one may not know.  
Oh, in the city, life, they say, is rounded and complete,  
Where all the world is passing in the ever-changing street.  
But I was wondering to-day what might the cities hold  
That little towns have not long known, though they may not have told!

For little towns have laughter, and little towns have love,  
And little towns have wedding pomp with golden moons above;  
And little towns have happiness and little towns have tears,  
And joy and grief and dancing feet and rose-besprinkled years.

And little towns have ugliness and beauty and desire,  
And sacrifice that immolates upon its shining fire;  
And little towns have death and birth and ecstasy and pain,  
And terror with the thunder and sunshine after rain.  
And I am wondering to-night what more than these can be  
In all the cities in the land, from sea to shining sea!

*Susan Myra Gregory*



# Heart's Desire

A STORY OF TWO PLAYS, TWO MEN, AND TWO WOMEN

By Leighton Osmun

JUST as Hugh Mackenzie was about to alight from his taxi in front of the Lambs, he saw two actors, friends of his, standing in the narrow entrance of the club, waiting for him. He drew back, for he was in no mood to talk to any one.

"Changed my mind," he said to his driver. "Take me to the Players, instead—Gramercy Park."

The two actors shrugged, and passed on into the club. This was just a vagary of one of the most successful among the younger producing managers. It was perfectly understandable.

The taxi continued along Forty-Fourth Street and turned south on Fifth Avenue. At Forty-Second Street the stream of traffic was held up, and the taxi stopped next to the curb.

Mackenzie, gazing gloomily at the crowds on the sidewalk, uttered an exasperated oath and shrank back in his seat. He had caught sight of a tall, thin young fellow, with his hands in trousers pockets, breasting without an overcoat the chilly November wind that swept down the avenue. Young Thorley was the last person Mackenzie wished to see, or to be seen by, just now.

He swore savagely, but Thorley had seen him. A moment later the young man's smiling, eager face, with deep-set, glowing eyes, appeared at the window of the taxi.

"Mr. Mackenzie, I don't want to seem to be waylaying you, but have you read my play yet?"

"I've been pretty busy, Thorley," the manager evaded.

The eager light died out of the young man's face, but the smile remained.

"I don't suppose you could tell me when you will have time to read it?"

"I'm going to try to get at it to-night, Thorley."

The face became eager again.

"That's good of you. Thanks!"

Mackenzie was spared the necessity of a reply. The red beam from the bronze traffic tower had flashed, and now the yellow light swept the traffic onward.

Again Mackenzie swore savagely. He could remember—and he did not wish to remember—the years, not so very long ago, when he, too, had been without an overcoat, thin and gaunt, battling New York, trying to shoulder past those who held the keys to the inner court of opportunity. Now he was one of those who held the keys.

Thorley, on the other hand, was a genius. No one could doubt it after reading his play, "Phantom," into which was packed all that the young man had suffered and learned in his four years of struggle in New York without money, without friends, without recognition.

"Phantom" had been submitted to Mackenzie for production, and thereby—thus chance or fate had rigged the scene—Mackenzie was placed in a situation of great temptation. If he yielded, he would send the play back to its author with polite regrets—not because he did not like the play, nor because he believed it would not make money, nor because his schedule was already filled. These would be valid reasons why any producer could honorably refuse to produce any play; but if Mackenzie declined "Phantom" it would be for personal reasons, to further private plans, at the expense of a youngster's genius which had a message of importance to give the world.

"That, to be damnably frank," Mackenzie told himself aloud, "is exactly the way the case stands!"

His taxi drew up in front of the Players, and Mackenzie entered the clubhouse

and walked to the dining room. It was quieter here than at the Lambs, and there was not the same eager, intense atmosphere. Mackenzie counted on being free from interruption while he lunched, so that he could give his whole attention to the problem that was confronting him.

He sat down at a table and gave his order. Then he tried to marshal the facts in his mind.

There were three factors in the problem—Thorley's play, "Phantom," another play, "Strands," and Rita Rayburn. As a business man, Mackenzie had to let one of the plays go. People thought of him as a successful producer, but he had rather overextended himself the last year. He was young—he must go slowly. One more production was all that he could swing, unless he deliberately chose to gamble, and that he would not do. There was hazard enough in this game, even using the utmost caution; so it was either one or the other of the plays.

As for Rita, well—

"Hello, Mac!"

He started and looked up.

"May I sit down a moment, old chap? Want to chin with you a bit."

Mackenzie forced a smile to his face, and nodded. Parent sat down opposite him.

"Read my script yet? Good title that, 'Strands'—eh?"

"I've read it."

"Well?"

"Good play."

"Does that mean you're ready to sign on the dotted line?"

"No."

Parent laughed comfortably. He could afford to, with two plays on Broadway running to capacity at nearly every performance, and one doing well on the road. Parent was a deft author, a man who had gauged the public's wants and satisfied them. He leaned across the table.

"You know, of course, whom I had in mind for star?"

"I've surmised. Suppose you tell me?"

"Rita Rayburn."

"My surmise was right, then."

"Part fits her like a glove, Mac. She'll be a wow in it!"

"I can believe that."

"Then—"

Mackenzie shook his head.

"I'm not ready to go on record yet."

"But listen, Mac! You'll promise this—

if you do produce 'Strands,' you'll give Rita the part?"

"Yes, I'll promise that."

"You see, Mac, old chap, I wrote it with her in mind. She's had a bad break, a devilish mean experience. Between you and me, you producers are a lot of bally sheep. Let a girl make a hit in a character part, and you'd keep her in nothing else."

"I'll admit some of that—not all."

"Rot! Look at Sharley Robinson—ten years on Broadway, and still doing the same old thing, because no manager will believe she can possibly do anything else. Now you've started the same game with Rita, just because she made a hit in a type part in 'The Love Shepherd.' Give Rita a straight part, and she'll stand 'em up!"

"I'm inclined to agree with you there."

"I'm glad of it. Frankly, Mac, I'm interested in the kid."

A questioning look in Mackenzie's eyes brought forth:

"No, not personally, although I like her—always did. I mean, as an actress."

"Rita's a good actress."

"All of that." He rose. "Now look here, Mac, do make it snappy about your decision on 'Strands.' To tell you the naked truth—nude, rather—Hammerman has asked for a squint at it as soon as you've finished."

"I'll let you know to-morrow morning."

"Good! I'll look in on you about eleven o'clock. By the way, I want a straight ten-per-cent contract."

Mackenzie shook his head, smiling.

"No!"

Parent laughed.

"Well, I thought I'd try it on, anyway. We'll haggle over terms to-morrow, then; but you'll make no mistake in producing this one, Mac. I've written a good many, and I'll bank on it."

Mackenzie smiled.

"The way all you chaps bank on a thing—with the producer's money!"

Parent laughed again.

"Devilish sharp to-day, Mac! A simple playwright is no match for you—eh? Well, I'm off. See you to-morrow."

Once more Mackenzie was facing his problem. Why not stop all this foolishness, and decide now? "Strands" was a good play. Most managers would consider it a better play than "Phantom." The fact that he didn't showed he was getting high-brow.

He tried to reason himself out of his admiration for Thorley's play, but he could not. He knew it was the best play he had read in ten years. He gave it up, and fell to thinking again of "Strands," of producing "Strands" with Rita Rayburn.

Rita!

His thoughts took a sudden jump into a golden mist of romance.

Rita!

## II

By the time Mackenzie finished luncheon, he had entirely forgotten the tall, thin form of Thorley toiling overcoatless against the whipping wind—a symbolic figure. Instead, his imagination was feasting on an electric sign boldly announcing:

"Hugh Mackenzie presents Rita Rayburn in 'Strands.'"

To Hugh Mackenzie, Rita Rayburn had always spelled heart's desire. From the first time he had met her, he had loved her with a peculiar sort of romantic idolatry completely foreign to his staid nature. She appealed to all the lighter side of his make-up with her bubbling vivacity, her piquant beauty, her sprightly grace. Even her somewhat flippant manner amused and delighted him.

To him she had always seemed an elfin creature, remote and out of reach. He saw her from time to time—not too often, or he might betray his feelings. She was like a firefly in a dusky wood, a fairy on the shore of a black lake; while he—it was not that he was old, but he felt old. Life had buffeted him, and he felt battered; but now—

He came to a sudden decision—he would produce "Strands," starring Rita Rayburn. The fact that he was giving her her big chance, the intimacies of rehearsal, the peculiar tie that exists between a star and her manager—all these things would change the old order, when he had not dared to do anything but stand apart. All these things would inevitably work in his favor, and against Thorley.

At the name, he was brought up sharply, as one who has run into a wall; but he strove to hurdle it. After all, that was only a boy and girl affair, a left-over from the time when Rita and Thorley—so he had heard—went to school together in their home city in the Middle West. Perhaps the story of their early association was not true. Broadway gossip had coupled their names—

that was all. Nothing in it at all, most likely.

He rose from the table and started out. He was stopped by Akinson, artist and sculptor.

"Give me a moment, Mac. I've something on my mind. Come over here." Akinson led the way to a corner, and pulled around a couple of chairs. "Sit down, Mac. Two minutes only—I know you fellows are always in a hurry!"

"I'll give you five," Mackenzie said with his slow smile.

The other nodded.

"It's about young Thorley. Now don't misunderstand me, Mac. This isn't any special pleading, or anything like that, only—you have a play of his, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"That's what I want to speak to you about. I know how you fellows flip over the first few pages of a manuscript, and then tell the office boy to write out a letter of condolence."

"Oh, you do?"

"Of course I do. Everybody above the status of moron knows that."

"Well, go on."

"In this case, I want you to read that play carefully, Mac. The fact is that this is the boy's last gasp. I found it out in a roundabout way. If you don't take the thing, he's going back West—beaten."

Mackenzie's heart gave a jump of joy before his conscience got into action and repressed it.

"You know that, Akinson?"

"I have every reason to believe it, Mac; and he's too good for us to lose. I've read that play. I tell you there's a lot in that fellow!"

"No doubt."

Mackenzie's tone was a little dry.

"There's another thing, Mac—he's in love with a mighty nice girl. You must know her—Rita Rayburn. They're banking on this thing going through to be married—at least, he is."

A gust of anger swept Mackenzie.

"So you think I would produce a play for—well, we'll say ulterior reasons?"

"Oh, come now, Mac, that's not fair! You know very well I'd be the last fellow in the world to ask you to do that."

The anger passed.

"I know you would, Akinson. I beg your pardon."

"Granted! This was the only idea I had



—I want you to give the thing an honest-to-God reading. As I told you, it struck me tremendously."

"I give every play that comes into my office an honest-to-God reading, Akinson," Mackenzie said with sardonic humor.

"Tell that to the interviewers, Mac!"

Mackenzie grinned.

"At least, I try to."

"But sometimes with one eye looking over period furniture for your next production but one—eh, Mac?"

"I don't pretend to be superhuman."

"You're the first producer I ever heard admit it," Akinson retorted, with his dry chuckle.

### III

THERE was no grin on Mackenzie's face when he drove back to his office. Akinson had compelled him to face the underlying fact of the whole situation. It wasn't a case of two plays, of "Phantom" and "Strands," but of two men—and Rita Rayburn.

The issue was fairly joined now. If he returned "Phantom," knowing it to be the better play, he would eliminate Thorley, would perhaps wreck the young fellow's life and talents. Damn it, why had he met Akinson? The whole thing had become too raw!

He let himself into his private office from the hallway, without going through the anterooms, and rang for his secretary. She entered—a clear-eyed woman of about his own age. Immediately he felt better, as he always did in her presence. Her serenity and poise always soothed him.

"Who's out there, Margaret?"

"A photographer—the man from Renton's, about those Chicago costumes—Ellersley—"

He interrupted. In his reaction, he accomplished a jest:

"What does Ellersley want?"

Of course he knew that there was only one thing that poor old Ellersley always wanted—a part.

She smiled, but went on without answering his question:

"And Miss Rayburn."

He started, but tried to conceal the start.

"I'll see Miss Rayburn first," he said in a perfectly controlled voice.

Margaret Haynes nodded, and went out. Mackenzie drummed nervously on his desk with his finger tips.

As Rita entered, a Fragonard in a modern theatrical office, a butterfly in furs, he rose and crossed to her. He felt younger—quite boyish.

"Greetings!" he said facetiously.

She laughed.

"And greetings right back at you!"

He placed a chair for her.

"Sit down, Miss Rayburn. What can I do for you?"

"I've come begging," she warned.

"Good! What about?"

"That part in Guy Parent's play. I want it!"

The rich, throaty quality of her voice thrilled him as it had thrilled him the first time he met her. It had feeling, depth. She was one of the few actresses who could read a line on a descending tone scale until it wrung the hearts of her audience. He could hear her in the star part of "Strands." Yes, she would make it a great success, a better play than Thorley's.

Again he hung up on the name. It flashed into his mind the strangeness of her coming to him just now, for she must know that he was considering "Phantom." Why was she forcing his hand in this matter? Perhaps the rumor about her being in love with Thorley was false. Of course it was! Thorley was in love with her—that was all. Hugh Mackenzie's spirits suddenly rose.

"I haven't decided to produce 'Strands' yet."

"Oh, but you must—you will do it! It's glorious! It will be a wonderful, smashing success!"

She was vibrant with enthusiasm. He smiled.

"You've read it?"

"Oh, yes! Guy Parent had me in mind when he wrote it. I saw the first draft, even."

"He didn't tell me that."

She laughed.

"I shouldn't have told you, either, though I don't know why—do you?"

"Well, no."

"Anyway, I can't help it, Mr. Mackenzie." She was very grave now, and seemed strangely agitated. Mackenzie had never seen her in this mood before. "I'm at the end of my rope. You know the deal I've had. You know what my notices were in 'The Love Shepherd' two years ago, and not a decent part since—just the same old thing over and over. You must do this

for me. You don't know how grateful I shall be!"

Tears shone in her eyes. Mackenzie wanted to take her in his arms and tell her that it was all right. He wanted to tell her that he would produce "Strands" for her, but something held him back. He said, instead, as he had said to Parent:

"Give me until to-morrow to decide. I'll promise you this, though, Rita." He drew a quick breath at his first use of her Christian name. "If I do produce the play, you shall have the part."

She sparkled into smiles again.

"Right, Mac! I'll hold you to that."

"You won't find me trying to get out of it."

She rose.

"And now I won't take up any more of your time," she said.

"No hurry—I've nothing to do."

She laughed and extended her hand.

"There are half a dozen people waiting for you out there, so exit Rita!"

He took her hand and gazed into her eyes. She returned the gaze, her own eyes luminous. In them he read promise. Words trembled on his tongue, but, as before, something held him back from uttering them. He said good-by conventionally, and dropped her hand. She crossed to the door, nodded at him brightly, and went out.

He drew a long breath. That settled it! He picked up Thorley's play, and rang for Margaret Haynes. Might as well have the damned thing over at once. He would send it back.

The door opened, and he extended his hand, holding the play; but it was not Margaret who entered, but Rita.

"I forgot to say—"

She stopped abruptly, her eyes on the manuscript in its cover of a peculiar shade of green. Her face flushed. The thing hung like *Banquo's* ghost between them. She hesitated, then turned and went out without finishing her sentence.

Margaret Haynes came in and stood at his side, calm, steadfast.

Long ago, when he had been a struggling publicity man, and had borrowed money to launch his first production, taking the Atlantic City time of a producer friend of his who could not use it, she had had a small part in the cast. That unlucky cast had seen the play live only two nights, the second night playing to only one paid admission. Margaret had fainted in her

dressing room, from hunger. Mackenzie had offered her a place as stenographer in his office, to which he was driven back.

Since then he had offered her part after part, for she was a capable actress, but she had refused. She preferred office work, she said. She knew as much about plays as he did, and as much about the business—contributed to it, in fact, as much as a partner could. He had advanced her salary until she had refused to accept further advances.

Margaret took the script that he still grasped in his outstretched hand.

"This goes back?"

"Yes—no—wait a moment!"

He hardly knew what he was saying. He felt like a traitor to young Thorley. He and Rita had both been traitors in a way—though he could excuse her on the grounds of her art and her necessity.

Margaret stood silent, waiting.

Suddenly Mackenzie said:

"Margaret, I want you to take these two plays home with you now. Read Parent's with Rita Rayburn in view, Thorley's with—we'll say John Yerek or Arch Hurley—that type. I'll produce the one you tell me to. I want a quick decision. At what time can you give it?"

"Ten o'clock."

"I'll be at your place at ten."

"Very well!"

She took the two manuscripts and left him. He felt a tremendous load roll off his mind. Whichever way it went, his conscience would be clear.

#### IV

WITH a white, set face, Margaret Haynes stepped into a taxi. By the time she reached her apartment on Fifty-Sixth Street, she felt physically ill. Without knowing it, Hugh Mackenzie had passed his problem to her.

She knew all the facts in the case. She had seen Hugh's face light up time and time again at the mention of Rita's name. She knew of the attachment between Thorley and Rita, and knew that Thorley was in his last ditch.

Moreover, she distrusted Rita and loved Hugh. She had loved him always. She had sacrificed what might have been a career on the stage to be near him. She had sensed long ago that he did not return her love, and never would. She was content merely to give, to stand by him, to watch

over him, to guide him. He needed guiding—what man doesn't?

She did not like Miss Rayburn. She recognized that Rita was a good actress, ambitious, and a hard worker; but she believed there were only two things that the woman loved or ever could love—the stage and herself. She would advance her own ambitions at whatever expense; and what more easy way than to marry a successful producing manager?

A sudden impulse to recommend Thorley's play, no matter whether she thought it good or bad, flashed into Margaret's mind, but she put it from her. Hugh had trusted her, and she must be faithful to the trust.

She pulled herself together, and sat down to read the plays. She read Thorley's first. She laid it aside, went out, and ate a light dinner. Then she came back and read Parent's.

She sat for a long time motionless, her heart like ice. An easy way out of the dilemma would have been before her, if she had considered Thorley's play better than "Strands"; but that way was denied her. "Strands," she felt, was by far the more attractive of the two pieces. With Rita in the star part, it would be a tremendous box-office success.

She could understand what Hugh had seen in "Phantom." He was a man of imagination, of quick grasp. Some day Thorley would be a great playwright, perhaps the greatest of them all; but not yet. His genius was still under cover. It peeped out occasionally, but for the most part it ran underground, and only an exceptional audience would dig out what he was trying to portray. No ordinary Broadway audience would get under the surface—of that she was sure.

Parent's play, "Strands," was the opposite. He had skillfully played up values, one against another, until every line told, every situation held. Any audience would get all of it—even more than was really there, perhaps.

Hugh had asked her to decide, and her decision must be that he should not produce Thorley's play, but Parent's, with Rita Rayburn.

Temptation came to her, saying:

"Don't be a fool! Hugh will come to care for you in time, if you keep other women away from him. Tell him to produce 'Phantom.' That will throw Rita into

Thorley's arms, where she belongs—the cat!"

"No!" replied Margaret firmly.

"Think of Thorley, and what it will mean to him to get recognition!"

"It's not my province to think of that," she returned.

"Then think of Hugh!"

That was different!

Her hands gripped each other until the knuckles stood out white. She glanced at the clock. In a few minutes he would be here, and she must tell him—"Strands," by all means, with Rita Rayburn. His face would light up, he would see his dreams beginning to come true. The play would add to his prestige, would give him capital to go ahead and swing other plays, would place his feet firmly on the upper rungs of the ladder. He would marry Rita. Then what?

Margaret could imagine him coming down to the office with ever a greater depression, a greater hunger in his eyes. What could she do then? Nothing.

She sat despairing until she was roused by the shrill of the electric bell. She rose, and pushed the button that released the catch on the front door.

She heard him coming up the stairs. An infinite love swept over her—a love so great that she forgot herself, a love so largely maternal that she thought only of him. In its white light everything else was cast into shadow.

He came in. She faced him.

"Well?" he asked breathlessly.

"You must produce Thorley's play, 'Phantom,' Hugh," she said calmly. "There is no question about it."

After a quick intake of breath, he asked her:

"That is your decision? You think his play is the better?"

"That is my decision, Hugh."

Mackenzie nodded, and turned away for a moment.

"Suppose you telephone Thorley now, Margaret. I've heard the poor chap is down on his luck. We'll give him a good contract, eh, Margaret?"

His pluck drew the quick tears to her eyes. She hurried to the phone.

"Yes, this is Henry Thorley," she heard presently.

"Mr. Thorley, I called you up to tell you that Mr. Mackenzie has decided to produce your play."



An exclamation at the other end of the wire.

"Does he like it? Does he think it good?"

Margaret smiled.

"That rather goes without saying, doesn't it? Will you come in to-morrow morning about the contract?"

"Certainly; but what I mean is, he thinks it really good?"

"I'm sure he does. Suppose we say about ten o'clock. You and I can talk over terms before Mr. Mackenzie gets down."

"I'll be there, but, Miss—er—"

"Haynes."

"But, Miss Haynes, you've read it, and please tell me, is it a great play—I mean really great?"

She laughed to herself, but her heart went out to him.

"I've read it," she said. "It's really a great play, Mr. Thorley."

A gasp of joy, a moment's silence, and then:

"I want to tell you how I happened to come to write 'Phantom,' Miss Haynes. You see—"

She laughed.

"Not to-night—tell me to-morrow. Good night!"

She hung up the receiver. The smile faded from her face as she went back to Hugh. Already the exaltation which had made the lie possible had died out. The shattered hopes in his face made her want to say:

"No, no—it's 'Strands' you ought to do—with Rita!"

She kept silent.

"If you don't mind, Margaret, I won't stay. I'll talk it over with you in the morning."

She nodded. He tried to rally.

"Well, we've got a great play there. I'll give it a good production, the best of which I am capable. It ought to prove a big success." Then he added: "I'm dog tired!"

"I know you're tired," she said. "You—"

She couldn't go on. Mackenzie looked at her solicitously.

"You look tired yourself, Margaret. You've been working very hard lately. I'm afraid I put too great a burden on you—reading these two plays, and asking for an instant decision."

A voice within her was crying out to him:

"Go—go—oh, please go!"

All that she said aloud was: "A little tired—yes."

"Well, get to bed, and have a good sleep. To-morrow's another day. Good night!"

He was gone. She sank into a chair.

"Liar—cheat—traitor!"

These words stung her; but deep down in her heart she didn't care—she couldn't care. She had saved him—yet at a price. She had given up something that she could never recover—her integrity. She might make up for it, but it would never be hers again unblemished, as it had been before. Hugh had trusted her, and she had been false to her trust!

## V

WHEN Margaret arrived at the office, the next morning, she found Thorley waiting for her. He was ecstatic with the joy that comes but once in a lifetime—the joy of first recognition.

She could not pin him down to talking about the contract. He was radiantly vague.

"Yes, yes!" he kept saying. "That's all right—perfectly all right!"

He was a dear boy, and a genius. She hoped for his sake that the play would be a great success.

He stayed and talked on about himself and his work. She listened sympathetically, but at last she was forced to say with an indulgent smile:

"Really you must go now, Mr. Thorley. I have some matters to take up with Mr. Mackenzie."

He sprang up in confusion.

"My besetting sin, Miss Haynes—talking about myself. Really I'm impossible!"

He laughed ruefully. She smiled at him and gave him her hand. Then she went in to Hugh Mackenzie, who was just hanging up the phone.

"That was Parent. It seems he took 'Strands' over to Hammerman, and Hammerman accepted it there and then. Rita Rayburn is to have the star part."

Before Margaret could answer, Hugh plunged into talk about the coming production. She was infinitely proud of him. His face was lined, almost haggard, but he gave no sign. Herself she despised, yet deep down in her heart she was glad—glad!

As she was entering her apartment that evening, the phone rang. It was Thorley,

who wanted to tell her that he and Rita had just been married.

She turned from the phone thoughtfully. There must have been more in Rita, she admitted, than she had given the girl credit for. In the face of her coming triumph, of her debut as a star, she had married young Thorley, who had nothing but his hopes and ambitions. The fact said a great deal for her.

A thought sprang into Margaret's mind. Now that Hugh was safe, she could confess to him what she had done. She pulled herself up sharply. No! She decided that she would bear her own burden, not thrust it on his shoulders.

Mackenzie heard the news of the marriage while he was dining at the Lambs. He had expected it, yet it made him catch his breath for a moment. Then he got hold of himself and sent his thoughts racing ahead—casting Thorley's play.

"Ellersley, come over here!"

The old actor hastened across the room, his eyes brightening.

"What is it, dear boy?"

"I've got a part for you, Ellersley—in the new Thorley play."

"Then there is a God after all! What's it like, Mac?"

"Small part, but fat. Come around tomorrow about noon. The sides will be ready then. Great play, Ellersley!"

"I've heard so. Well, may it run three years on Broadway—the old actor's prayer!"

"Oh, certainly!"

Mackenzie found, to his surprise, that he could laugh naturally.

"I'll be over at noon. Good part, is it—one I can get my teeth in?"

"More than that—you can chew it all over the lot."

"Grand!"

"Phantom" won cautious praise from the critics. All the first-line men were there, and all agreed that there was a tremendous lot in the play; but they differed as to how much had been brought out. "Underdeveloped" was the note running through most of their criticisms.

The public, however, wanted none of it. Hugh held it on for three weeks, and then regretfully sent it to the storehouse—for it was not a road play.

Thorley took the blow in the proper spirit. He raged against critics and public, and even criticized the production and the cast, but he sat down to write another that would show the swine, damn them!

These were queer days for Hugh Mackenzie. Fits of immense depression when he thought of Rita Rayburn alternated with a furtive sense of relief. He had lost Rita. He was weary with life, with everything. Then would come a little spark of happiness, almost like a feeling of escape.

Then an amazing thing happened, seemingly, without any definite cause to bring it about. One day, when Margaret was standing by his desk, he looked up, and, instead of his secretary standing there, he saw—a woman.

### THE SUMMER ISLES

SKIES that are pure are rare as seas  
Blessed with a crystal sky-pure blue.  
Bermuda, you have both of these;  
Therefore twice rare, twice blessed, are you.

Shores that are green the whole year round,  
Gardens that blaze from June to June,  
Also are yours, Bermuda, bound  
By reefs that surely seem no boon.

Was the gray rock designed to curb  
Your pride, or did the golden sun  
Kiss twice, for that, your humblest herb,  
And fuse the skies and seas to one?

*Richard Butler Glanzer*

# Crumbs

## A BACHELOR WOMAN DISPLAYS HER WISDOM IN MATTERS MATRIMONIAL

By Mella Russell McCallum

**H**ILDA was in her room at the Hotel Paradise, dressing for dinner—dressing slowly, luxuriously. Her two windows faced the beautiful mountain view advertised in the hotel booklet; but Hilda wasn't thinking of rocky sweeps and pine tang.

After dinner, the dining room would be cleared for dancing. She would dance. She would dance with stoutish Mr. Prady, and the professor—and Gary Faire.

She didn't care about stoutish Mr. Prady, except that he was something to dance with, nor about the professor, drab and dull; but Gary Faire! Last night he had guided her through a French window and out upon the dark veranda. It had been a waltz. Hilda had heard unspoken words.

She felt well, putting on her clothes. They were nice clothes—nice from the skin out—silk underthings—sheer gray silk hose. Hilda loved the feel of silk.

Well, she had earned silk. For years and years she had worked—typist, stenographer, secretary, and now office manager of the Rite-Fit Company. She had started to work at seventeen. Now she was—but Hilda never told her age. She never thought of her age, if she could help it.

What did age matter, she asked the mirror? And the mirror, although it was only a common or garden variety of mirror in an imitation mahogany dresser, answered:

"Age doesn't matter. You look lovely!"

Hilda smiled. When she was all done, she challenged the mirror again. She was a gray-eyed brunette, with rather high color. The color was partly rouge, of course, but every one rouged. Even little Letty Kingdon covered her wild-rose tint with that fantastic new brick color.

Hilda's gray crape frock was diagonally slashed by a twisted amber-colored girdle.

There were black and amber dangles in her ears.

She turned sidewise, to look at her silhouette. A woman's silhouette, she knew, is most important. It must be straight—no breaks. Hilda was at an age when it is difficult to keep a good silhouette, but with money and determination it can be done.

She came closer to the reflection. Gary Faire had said to her last night:

"You know, Miss Warren, I think you're a peach!"

What had he meant? Had he meant that he thought her beautiful? Had he?

She wondered, wistful, thrilling; and again the mirror stood by:

"You are beautiful. You are vivid. Your eyes have shine. Your hair has shine. You are a flame!"

To-night, perhaps—

Nonsense! Gary Faire was too young—under twenty-five, while she—

There she went, thinking about age again! What did age matter?

"Age doesn't matter. You are a beautiful flame," chanted the mirror.

The copper gong in the hall below had not yet released its genteel, muted summons. Hilda sat down to wait, polishing her faultless nails against her palm. To-night, perhaps—

Against her will she thought of another night. She was twenty. It was on a Coney Island boat. A curly-headed boy was begging her to marry him. The boy's soul shone in his eyes, pleading with her. She wanted to say yes; but he was only a shipping clerk, and she was tired of poverty. At twenty she was already promising herself silk underthings.

Later she had refused other men—a drug clerk, a bookkeeper. That hadn't hurt so much.



The curly-haired boy, long married, had children almost grown now. Oh, well!

It had been best. She had reached her goal. Now she could have the best of everything. She could spend a whole month up here in the Catskills. Where would she be if she had married? Drudging, ill groomed, in a five-room flat, most likely. The curly-haired boy kept his brood over on Eighth Avenue—ugh!

Yes, she had certainly been lucky. Now, with looks and means and sense, life was just beginning.

"What good is youth, if you waste it?" she asked herself. "Now—now the sky is my limit. Isn't that so, mirror?"

Not quite understanding, the mirror smiled, and repeated:

"You are very beautiful."

A light step sounded, and a light, imperative tap on the door. Hilda, admitting Letty Kingdon, was conscious of a sudden sharp distaste.

Letty Kingdon looked all her eighteen years. Her skin was browned darker than her yellow half curls. Her eyes were wide and gray, not unlike Hilda's. She wore a yellow sweater and a white, finely pleated skirt.

"Gee, Miss Warren, you're all lit up like a church!"

Hilda smiled, annoyed.

Letty flung herself down in a wicker chair, with one leg over the arm. One of her stockings was yellow and the other pale green.

"I ought to dress, I know. Mother'll be mad; but I'm tired. Gary Faire's been trying to break down my tennis, and he can't do it. He did give me a run, though! I came in here to escape mother. Oh, you needn't stare, Miss Warren—I've had my bath! I'm fresh, if I haven't got on the right things. Mother keeps my doll-up stuff in the back of the closet, and it's too much trouble; so I just jumped into these. I couldn't be bothered."

"Are you going down to dinner in those stockings?"

Letty surveyed her legs.

"If I can get past mother!" Her grin was like a wave breaking into foam.

Hilda smiled. She hated Letty—no, not Letty, exactly, but the youth of Letty. The child would dance all evening in those sports things, with unmated hose.

Well, never mind! Gary Faire might bang about a hot tennis court with Letty,

but he had guided Hilda through the French window last night, and told her she was a peach!

"Gee, you're certainly stunning, Miss Warren," Letty burst out, after a critical stare. "Every one of your hairs is just so. Corking gown, too. But how can you stand corsets?"

Letty jumped up and stretched her entire body. The silhouette was not *her* problem. She was hard and lean—and yet soft, too.

"Got a new stunt, Miss Warren. Practiced it on the horizontal bars down by the courts. Gary Faire bet me an orchid corsage I couldn't do it, but I did. I told him to buy himself a silk shirt instead—one of those corking gray ones. I can't be bothered wearing flowers. But he didn't. Want to see my stunt?"

She placed her hands on the brass foot rail of Hilda's bed, drew herself up slowly, and thrust herself, feet first, over the rail.

"Some stunt!" agreed Hilda, with rage in her heart.

She had spent an hour dressing. Letty had plunged into a quick tub—cold, most likely—jammed a comb into her hair, and thrown on the first garments at hand.

But never mind! Time would show.

The dinner gong sounded.

## II

THE dining room of the Paradise Hotel might have been called "Eternal Springtime"—but still the laurels would have gone to Rodin. It had green and white latticed walls, covered with roses. The tables held four guests each. Hilda sat with three women she had known a long time.

Gertrude Berg was a buyer for Korrek Klotthes—stout, beetle-browed, masculinely handsome in black lace. Annette Blythe taught French ten months a year—a slender ash-blond, invariably dressed in blue. Bird Hollings, eldest of the four—and keenest—was a character actress of small but settled importance. Bird was frankly homely, with graying hair. If any of the other three had a gray hair, it didn't show. Bird wore trying white gowns with a certain distinguished carelessness.

But of the four, Hilda was easily the belle.

"Good dinner," commented Gertrude, who adored food.

"Yes," drawled Annette. "What do we do to-night?"

"Oh, watch the younger generation play, as usual," said Bird cheerfully; "and seize what crumbs are flung our way."

Hilda was silent. She almost hated her friends to-night. They seemed so old. Crumbs! Was it a crumb that Gary Faire had thrown her?

No—no!

After dinner, while the waiters hurried to get done, so that they might go home to their families, the four strolled outside. The sheared lawn was soft to walk upon. An amber afterglow of light came through the elms, softening the somewhat garish green paint of the building.

The walking space wasn't large. To the tennis courts—to the garage—to the rustic tea house by the struggling, choked brook—and back again; unless they cared to strike off on a mountain path beyond—which they didn't.

"The younger generation—I'm so sick of it!" groaned Gertrude.

"You talk as if you were fifty," Hilda snapped.

Gertrude gave her short, heavy laugh.

"Have you had a massage to-day, Hilda? You look awfully spiffy."

"Thanks! No, I haven't had a massage to-day."

She hadn't—that is, not a professional one. Bird Hollings looked Hilda over.

"Crumbs, my dear Hilda, are sometimes most nourishing—especially if they are buttered."

Hilda was silent. Yes, she hated the girls to-night—the cryptic Bird most of all.

"There's a glow about you, Hilda." Annette never rubbed one the wrong way. "I love you in that gown!"

"I'm mad about Hilda's silhouette," sighed Gertrude. "Could it have been the chocolate éclairs I lunched on for fifteen years that caused my downfall?"

So it was true, what the mirror said! The girls noticed it; and the girls—except Annette—weren't given to kindness for its own sake.

A desire to be generous flooded Hilda, thinning out the hate. The world was so full of possibilities. Behind her the hotel orchestra was tuning up. She beamed upon her friends almost tenderly.

"I think you all look corking, too," she said.

"Crumbs—crumbs!" chuckled Bird Hollings. "How we do love 'em! Crumbs from the main feast—we toss 'em around,

and play with 'em—and then we gobble 'em up!"

"Well, where's the harm?" demanded the kind ash-blonde. "I think we ought to hand each other all the honest compliments we can, at our age. Hilda, I think you're beautiful!"

What a dear Annette was! A dear, in spite of that "at our age."

The orchestra broke into a fox trot.

"Let's not go back to-night," Gertrude suggested. "I'm sick of watching kids have a good time."

"Oh, we must go back," said Annette quickly.

"Yes, what would Mr. Prady and our learned friend the professor do without us?" Bird Hollings laughed. "Besides, our Hilda has a young man."

"That's right," agreed Gertrude. "How come, Hilda?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about," said Hilda.

In the room of green and white lattices and eternal roses—the dining tables pushed back in an even bank along one side—two men joined them promptly. Mr. Prady wasn't really fat, but he was pink and bald, and seemed fat. The professor was an impeccable walking brain.

Mr. Prady asked Hilda for a dance. The professor claimed Annette. Gertrude and Bird sat down and chatted with Judge Willis, who didn't dance. Letty Kingdon's mother, gray-haired and harassed, came and joined the group of sitters.

Circling with Mr. Prady, Hilda took in the scene. Young people, mostly—mere children, it seemed to her. A green and yellow twinkle across the room was Letty's ankles. Gary Faire wasn't in sight.

Mr. Prady was saying pleasant things. One was—

"Do you know you're looking extremely well to-night, Miss Warren?"

"Oh, nonsense!" she snapped.

She didn't want a bald head with fringe making love to her. Still, it was something—another ally of the mirror.

Gary Faire came into the room—tall, brown, with nice deep-set eyes, and a chin like a collar advertisement. He looked about. Hilda thought he looked about hungrily.

At the end of the dance Mr. Prady took her back to her group, and asked Gertrude for the next dance. The professor danced with Bird. Hilda and Annette were left to

chat with the judge and Mrs. Kingdon. It was the regular procedure.

Then Gary Faire came and asked Hilda for a dance.

They moved in silence—a silence so long that Hilda wondered if he would speak at all. She hoped not. She could dance on forever so.

Letty was twinkling about with another boy. When they came close to her, Gary broke the silence.

"Letty Kingdon is a little beast!" he said.

"Is she?"

"Yes!"

Silence again. When the music stopped, he released Hilda with the engaging personal smile that was one of his assets.

Then Gary danced with a child in pink tulle, while Hilda sat and listened to the troubles of Letty Kingdon's mother:

"I told her that if she dared to dance in that ridiculous outfit, she'd be sorry—and she will be. There she has a rose chiffon, and a green net, and a white crape, all hanging in the closet; and that poor boy's orchids wasting upstairs in the ice-water pitcher! I said to her, 'When I was a girl, and a young man sent me flowers, I had the grace to wear them!' And what do you think she answered me? 'Oh, forget it, mother! The posies were a debt of honor, and, anyhow, I can't be bothered!' Now, what do you think of that?"

Mrs. Kingdon's earrings jingled.

"Children get away with murder these days," sighed the judge, in his asthmatic voice.

Suddenly Mrs. Kingdon leaned toward Hilda.

"Miss Warren, you have so much influence over Letty—she admires you so much. Won't you prevail upon her to be sensible?"

"I'll try," Hilda agreed.

What did she care how silly Letty was? She sat on the extreme edge of the group, and thought her own thoughts.

That divine dance! Wordless, almost—perfect! Last night he said she was a peach. To-night, already, he had danced with her, and his wordlessness had been so full of words!

If Gary Faire was interested—wished to go on—perhaps marry—what then? He was an obscure young architect; but she had her good berth at the Rite-Fit. She needn't give that up. Her mind flew on. Many married women earned money.

They could have a comfortable apartment—a home—

God! What was she thinking?

Round and round with Mr. Prady. Round and round with the professor. Then Gary Faire again.

A waltz—once around, then out through the window. The veranda was the nicest part of the hotel, wide and long and dim. There was only one other couple out there—kids—the girl in baby blue, with demure brown braided rolls over her ears. Hilda saw the boy kiss one of the rolls.

Hilda closed her eyes. Her hair was more lustrous than that child's!

"Miss Warren!"

Young Faire sounded tense. She wished he would call her Hilda.

"Miss Warren!" He gulped. "You've been such a peach—" He stopped, and gulped again. Ah, that waltz! Her racing pulse! "You know what an abominable fussier her mother is. She almost drives Letty mad. Letty says you've been so lovely to her—and your room has been like a sanctuary—"

What on earth was the young man talking about?

"And—and—oh, won't you use your influence to get her to accept me?"

One doesn't come up through the mill of typist, stenographer, secretary, to office manager, without using masks.

"Why, yes, I'll try, Mr. Faire," Hilda heard her voice say.

"Call me Gary, won't you? You know, I feel as if you were going to be sort of a fairy godmother, or aunt, to me."

"All right, Gary—yes, I'll see what I can do."

### III

THE evening jazzed along. Mrs. Kingdon's thin lips pressed more firmly.

"I've decided what to do with that girl—I'll put her in St. Margaret's School. It's eleven o'clock now. She has *one* hour of grace. If she doesn't go upstairs and dress decently before the last dance, we *pack to-morrow*."

Hilda looked across the room at Letty's noisy court. The girl's color flared through rouge and sunburn. Letty was laughing too loudly. Gary Faire stood apart from the court, his arms folded theatrically.

"What do I care?" Hilda muttered.

She rose unwillingly, and made her way across the floor.



"Oh, Letty, come here a moment, will you, dear?"

The words sounded as if spoken by a kindly old aunt. The girl flashed her sunny grin on Hilda, and obeyed. Hilda propelled her through a window. The child with the braided rolls moved farther along with her boy.

"Letty, don't be an idiot!" Hilda said earnestly. "Your mother means business, I warn you. Go up and put on your prettiest frock—do you hear? And wear the orchid corsage!"

Letty stiffened—then relaxed.

"Oh, Miss Warren, I know I've been a fool, but—oh, I hate to give in to Gary! He wants to get married!"

"And why not, I'd like to know?" barked Hilda.

"You advise marriage—you, the successful bachelor woman?"

"Not for myself, of course. I wouldn't dream of it; but for you—yes, dear, I advise it."

It was the last dance. Hilda circled neatly with Mr. Prady.

"For it's thre-e-e o'clock in the mo-o-o-ning," wailed the music.

Mr. Prady didn't do the new dances well—he had called them "the new dances" for at least twenty years—but he could waltz all right.

The dance was nearly over when he spoke suddenly.

"I'm not a marrying man, Miss Warren; but—will you marry me?"

Hilda waltzed on remotely. Across the room two people were dancing as if they were the only couple in the world—a girl in rose chiffon, with a bunch of orchids crushed against her partner.

In the smarting haze of Hilda's mind a small white ghost stood shyly—the ghost of what could have been, and should have been. That mental vision made her tones less crisp.

"I turned down the proposal I should have accepted, Mr. Prady. It was on a Coney Island boat—a long time ago. I passed up the main feast, and now—" She stopped. It would be unkind to call Mr. Prady offer a crumb. "Thank you—but I couldn't!"

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### BY FEATHER RIVER

OVER the Feather River

The round gold moon rode high;

To the east on the dim horizon

A planet burned in the sky.

The peaks of the Feather River,

They lifted in stately lines,

And a haunting wind came calling

Down the road of the sister pines.

Away from the Feather River

I went with the moon and star;

On the wings of the wind I journeyed

To another vale afar;

Far, far from the Feather River

By a path that had no chart

To another violet valley—

The valley of my heart!

What were the bonds of the body

To hold me from love's goal?

No power by the Feather River

Could leash my longing soul!

*Ross Hamilton*

# Suspicion

## THE STORY OF A FALSE ACCUSATION

By Reita Lambert

### XXI

THE night—the longest he had ever known—wore away, with old Peter Stayton measuring off the interminable hours with his restless prowlings between the gate and the little back porch; hearing Richard's returning step in every stirring leaf, in the furtive scurry of furred or feathered night creatures. As the hours dragged by and Richard did not come, the old man's sense of shame and guilt transcended the fierce resentment of those past few days, and he was assailed by remorse—self-loathing.

The feeble light from the high windows of the tower room poured steadily forth, and seemed to be reproaching him plaintively. Desperately he nursed his languishing sense of grievance. He told himself that what he had done had been in the girl's behalf; but the attempted justification failed to satisfy him. There had been a certain ennobling dignity in the attitude of Dorcas and Richard, beside which his own conduct seemed more and more inglorious.

The thought of the girl alone in the tower, awaiting her husband's return, recurred to torture him each time his reluctant gaze was drawn to those lighted windows. Well, presently, he told himself, she would come down in search of Richard, and would hear the tale of his ignominious collapse. It would not be an easy tale to tell. Indeed, shame burned old Peter at the prospect; but it would prove to her, at least, that the man who had betrayed her was unworthy of her allegiance.

If he did not come back, this in itself would be an admission of his cowardice. Surely she would recoil at that! It was possible that their common contempt would be a foundation for their reconciliation. To

have her back—his daughter! Peter Stayton's pulse leaped.

As he prowled back and forth, back and forth, his thoughts seemed to merge confusedly with the gurgle of the incoming tide and the ceaseless whisper of dumb nocturnal things. The stars paled, and the darkness crowded in upon him. Only the light in the tower windows still glowed.

His anxiety about the girl increased. Was she asleep up there, or was she still waiting, as women did wait for their men? Time after time he tiptoed indoors and stood at the foot of the stairs, listening. Once he started up to her, but an obdurate pride, the memory of that slammed door, held him back.

He fell asleep at last beneath the dew-heavy morning glory vines, with his head against the door jamb, and woke to see another dawn stalking mistily across the lawn. For a moment he sat blinking, held by a dumb misery whose source he could not trace. Then he rose, cramped and chilly, and flung a swift glance toward the tower.

The light had gone out of the windows, as if their long vigil had rendered them sightless. Dew lay thickly on the grass and shrubs. There was an incipient elation in old Peter's heart as he swung off down the road. Richard had not come back!

Of this Peter was certain, since the front door had been locked, and his own huddled body had blocked the back entrance. Richard had not come back—he had run away! Or could he still be lying there unconscious—dead, perhaps?

The old man's elation was snuffed out by the thought. Fear urged him forward now—fear that he might find that prostrate figure where he had left it beside the road; remorse that passion should have made of him its purblind agency.

When he reached the crossroads, and stood where he had stood last night, his breath was coming hard and fast. Here was the spot, here was an impression in the long grass where Richard had lain; but that was all. Even the tweed cap, which Peter remembered to have seen lying beside the huddled figure, was gone.

There was a grim consolation for him in this discovery. A dying man, or even one seriously wounded, would not be likely to retrieve a fallen cap. His elation came back with a rush, mingled with contempt, and with sudden pity for Dorcas, who had waited all night in the tower for her lover.

Well, the fellow had gone like a yellow dog, had tucked his tail between his legs and run. It was what old Peter had wanted—a final proof of the city man's worthlessness, a final verification of his own suspicions. The girl was a Stayton, and a Stayton would forgive much, but not cowardice. She had been loyal to the cur, but now she would despise him. Peter would have his girl again!

The thought lubricated his cramped muscles as he swung up the path toward the back door. He would make a pot of coffee, and would carry her a cup. Oddly enough, he was no longer thinking of her own guilty participation in the affair. Somehow Richard's flagrant desertion had absolved her. He saw her now as a child, swept off her feet by a suave scoundrel, and deceived and abandoned by him. He saw her weeping out her sorrow on her father's breast, coming back to him a repentant daughter. He would forgive her.

He was pulsating with eagerness as he hurried around to the porch and up the steps. The door stood open, as he had left it, and an aroma of freshly boiling coffee greeted him. Dorcas stood beside the stove with a cup in her hand. She glanced up at him for a fleeting instant before she lifted the coffeepot and tipped it over the cup.

He was held there, first by astonishment, then by a creeping apprehension born of an unwonted strangeness in her appearance. His eager hopes chilled, and the words of comfort he had intended to speak withered on his lips. It was a long moment before his fumbling senses accounted for the physical change in her.

Instead of the habitual bright gingham frock, she was wearing the street dress reserved for those rare occasions when she went to town. A straight little dark blue

garment it was, with a severe white collar and cuffs. Its darkness accentuated the pallor of her skin. Its long, close lines added to her height and lent her a sedateness, as if she had unconsciously dressed not her body, but her abruptly matured soul.

After that first cursory glance, she did not look at him again, but poured her coffee, went to the table, dropped a cube of sugar into the cup, and started with it toward the hall door. With his conciliatory hopes clipped by her cold ignoring of his presence, Peter's wrath flooded back afresh.

"We-ell!" he snarled, intent on holding her there. "Are you blind this mornin'? Or mebbe you've lost your tongue." She went on as if he had not spoken, and he raised his voice. "Where d'you think you're goin', anyway? Can't you answer a civil question?"

She stopped in the doorway, and looked back at him reflectively.

"Is it a civil question?"

"Well, ain't it? I asked you where you was goin'?"

"Yes—I heard you."

"Well, then?"

"But I don't care to answer."

"Oh, you don't!" he roared. "High and mighty this mornin', ain't you? Seems to me you ain't got much to be high and mighty about!"

She shrugged her shoulders hopelessly, and started away once more; but her white tranquillity had enraged him, and he flung a taunt after her.

"Mebbe you're goin' to look fer him, eh? Fer that fine, gallant husband of yours! Well, you'll sure have to grease your shoes, girl!"

His taunt had the desired result. Dorcas turned back again, but now her eyes were wide with sudden suspicion. Peter laughed boisterously.

"Did he leave a forwardin' address with you? You know where he's gone, I calculate! Oh, sure!"

She came slowly back to the table, set her steaming cup down with stilted precision, and faced him.

"Do you?" she whispered. "Do you?"

"Oh, sure—sure!" he gloated. "Don't think he'd leave *me* without tellin' me his address, so I could send him a Christmas card, do you?"

She took a sip of coffee, held there by a growing fear, an intuitive sense, that there was more behind her father's words than



his desire to wound her. Eager questions crowded to her lips, but pride kept them back—pride and the fear of humbling herself or of betraying Richard. Watching her, Peter nursed his fury on her noncommittal silence. A gesture of appeal would have brought him to her side, a tear would have moved him to protestations of affection; but her remote detachment, her calm, tragic face, were at once a reproach and an irritant.

"Now he's gone," he sneered, "I *would* run after him—that's what I'd do, sure! I guess you'll find he needs a nursemaid, all right! But you'll have to hurry if you want to catch up with him, I calc'late."

He only stopped then because her pallor and the uncertainty of the step she took toward him frightened him. Contrary to his hopes, she did not reply, but stood looking up at him, her left hand laid over her heart, where it contrasted sharply with the dark stuff of her dress. Then she turned and hurried away, passing through the hall and up the stairs to her own room, where he heard her quick footsteps over his head.

Peter waited in a maze of fury, bewilderment, and disgust, hugging to himself his knowledge of Richard's ignominious departure, reserving it jealously against the vague emergency that he anticipated. When he heard her coming down, he strode into the hall and stood at the foot of the stairs.

She was wearing a little, close-fitting hat and carrying a bulky suit case. A pair of kid gloves—indisputable evidence of her intentions—hung from her free hand. The sight threw Peter into a panic. He stood, a quivering barricade, at the bottom step, one hand on the newel post, the other spread against the wall.

"So you're goin', eh?"

Her glance went through and beyond him.

"Let me pass, please!"

"Pass!" he echoed. "I ought to thrash you within a inch of your life fer not havin' the spunk of a jellyfish!"

"But of course you wouldn't dare," she said quietly. "Let me pass, please!"

He wagged his head from side to side, like an enraged beast.

"Where do you think you're goin'?"

"When you ordered me from your house," she said contemptuously, "you did not tell me where to go!"

"I—I ordered *him* out of my house!" he bellowed.

"And me," she reminded him.

"Be you goin' after him? Have you sunk that low—when he's deserted the ship and left ye to swab the deck? Is that the sort of woman you are?"

"Perhaps," she said. "And now will you let me pass, please?"

The fact that he could not rouse her in her own defense, and the sight of her white, determined face, reduced him to a paroxysm of rage.

"Don't worry—I'll let you pass!" he screamed. "Go find him, if you can! You'll know him by his color—it's yellow! You'll find him hidin' somewheres—behind his mother's skirts, likely—with a couple of nice black eyes I give him as a token of my friendship, and with his nice, purty necktie all mussed up like his lyin' face! Oh, you'll find him, but not hereabouts—not where I can get my hands on him again—not by a long shot!" Peter laughed raucously. "He warn't any too tickled with his bargain, anyway. All he needed was a little encouragement from me to shift his helm and steer fer his home port. *That's* what you married—a lubberly swab! If you want that kind of a husband, go get him! Go find him, an' kiss away his tears!"

As he talked, her weary quiescence was replaced by an alert attentiveness, by a sudden horrified comprehension. She put her hand on the stair rail for support.

"You—you mean you fought? You and Richard?"

"Fought!" he snarled. "Yellow dogs don't fight—they run. Your noble young man warn't no exception to the rule."

"You struck him?"

It was as if she spoke in order to convince herself.

"That's a ladylike word. What I done to him warn't ladylike. I'm sorry I done it, too. If I 'a' knowed what he was, I wouldn't 'a' dirtied my hands on him. I'd 'a' horsewhipped him—that's the kind of medicine one deals out to yellow dogs. *Now* do you think you'll go and find him, now that you know what he is—now that he's run away from you?"

He had roused Dorcas at last. He fell back under no mean counterpart of his own fury.

"You—you struck him—you struck Richard? Where is he? What have you done with him? You've killed him!"

"I wish I had!" Peter roared.

"You did? You—you *thing!* And you call *him* a coward?"

"And so he is! Didn't I tell you he run! It ain't so easy to kill a mongrel. I only had to hit him once—or twice to make him take to his heels. Ain't I jest been to look and found him gone!"

"Gone?" she cried. "Gone from where?"

"From where I left him wallowin' in the dirt—that's where!"

She shrank away from the old man, the back of her hand against her mouth, her eyes full of ineffable horror.

"You—you did that—after everything else—you, my own father? But you're not, you're not! I shall never call you that again—never! I hate you, I despise you! I never want to see your face again!"

She was hurrying across the hall and through the kitchen. He stumbled along behind her, his world reeling in the red haze of his wrath.

"Then go—and God forgive you! You'll pay fer them words! I told you what he was. I may have been wrong to hit him, but it showed him up fer what he was. If you desert your own father fer him now, you'll deserve what you get!"

"You're not my father!" she flung back at him. "You're not my father! You don't know what you've done! You don't know—you don't know—"

The words floated over her shoulder, a sorrowful repudiation, as she hurried down the path, her slight figure dragged down by the weight of the bulky suit case. Peter raised his arms, and for a moment they wavered above him irresolutely, but the curse that had risen to his lips metamorphosed itself into a feeble invocation.

"My God! My God, help me! Dorcas—Dorie—come back!"

But she was walking swiftly up the road, between the waving fields of beach grass. Her father's hoarse appeal merged itself into the splash of water against the sand and the guttural rasp of old Timmy Frye's voice raised in a jovial chanty as he staked off his oyster spawn.

## XXII

MR. BECKWITH shifted the weight of the immaculately swathed tray he was carrying, so that one hand should be free, and knocked lightly on the door of the rectory spare bedroom; but it was not like him to await a formal response, and he bustled in

immediately, his voice lifted in a cheery greeting.

"Well, well! Good morning! And how is the invalid this morning? Better, I hope! Sleep well? The birds waked you, I expect. They greet each dawn as if it were the last—or the first!"

The room was a wide, low-ceilinged chamber, with a riot of faded pink roses clambering over the wall paper, and with venerable antique furnishings, of which a corded bedstead held the place of honor between the windows. As he talked, the little clergyman deposited his tray on a small table and drew it close to the bed, flinging a sharp glance at the bandaged face on the pillows as he did so—a glance half severe, half compassionate.

"Such a day, such a day!" he went on. "You'll like these rolls. Mrs. Mills—my housekeeper—is famous for them—and for her coffee. Wait until you've sampled it. Think you can sit up? Here, let me help!"

Richard shook his head in protest, and dragged himself up, while his discursive host propped an obese pillow behind his head.

"You're very good," he said. "I'm sorry to have imposed on you like this."

"Impose—nonsense! How much sugar—two? Good! Just you taste this coffee. It 'll set you up like nothing else."

Richard took the proffered cup, steadied it against his knee, and regarded the clergyman perplexedly from between his swollen lids. The little parson's face was drawn, his eyes were darkly ringed, but the fortitude and charity for which he had prayed through the long, silent hours of the night had been granted him.

The repugnance born of Richard's astounding confession the night before had left him—but not at once. He had found himself facing a condition that violated all the doctrines of his rigorous creed—a condition for which his orthodox principles offered no justification. Yet from his sacred book he had picked a verse that served him:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

He recalled it resolutely now as he looked at Richard, and at the bulky bandages which he himself had adjusted over his guest's ugly abrasions.

"That's right—drink your coffee. Good, isn't it?"

"Very," agreed Richard; "but I'm a little confused. It was last night I came here, wasn't it?"

"That's right—it was last night."

"And now—is it late in the day?"

"No, indeed, it is still early—not yet nine o'clock, in fact."

"And have you—has any word—"

Richard's voice hung there. The clergyman picked up the sentence.

"Have I heard anything from Peter, or from Dorcas? Is that what you want to know?"

"Yes."

"No—not yet. I don't expect to, come to think of it. They would scarcely think of coming to me."

Silence fell between them. Richard sipped his coffee. Mr. Beckwith, with a lively simulation of cheerful nonchalance, drew a chair to the side of the bed and sank into it.

"I see you appreciate Mrs. Mills's coffee! How about a roll now?"

Richard shook his head.

"You must have had a bad time with me last night," he said.

"No—oh, no! I've had many worse times, my friend. You're feeling better this morning?"

"Much, thanks."

"You slept?"

"Perhaps. I'm not quite certain. My thoughts—"

"Thoughts are tantalizing things. I've often said that they're like fleas—busiest when you're the quietest."

Richard essayed a smile, set his cup on the table beside him, and sank back against his pillows.

"They were not pleasant, those thoughts, Mr. Beckwith!"

The clergyman's smiling lips pursed gravely.

"No, no—I suppose not. My own—well, they were not exactly gay."

"Gay? No, they wouldn't be that, would they?" mused Richard. "I'm sorry," he added.

The brevity of that last phrase sent a hot rush of color to Mr. Beckwith's face.

"Sorry!" he exploded. "Sorry! As if that helped! One would think you were expressing regret that your shaving water wasn't warm!" He bent forward impulsively. "Do you realize fully what this thing means to me—as an individual and as a clergyman?"

"Can you ask me?" returned Richard wearily.

"That's exactly what I am doing! The more I think of it, the more monstrous it seems! And to think that I—"

"To think that you shared Mr. Stayton's suspicions to the extent of marrying us without a license—is that what you were going to say?"

The unexpected accusation brought the minister to his feet with a bounce.

"God knows I thought I was doing the right thing! After all, I am only human. I knew Pete Stayton—knew him to be a just person. The law in this State gives me a right to perform the marriage ceremony without a license if I consider that circumstances warrant it. Peter gave me every reason to believe that this was such an emergency. I was wrong!" The admission hung there for an instant before he turned on Richard in a volcanic outburst of indignation. "But you—man—you! What right have you to question me or my motives? Do you realize what you have done to that girl's life?"

"Yes," said Richard swiftly. "I realize it far more fully than you can; but my greatest regret is not yours. You're thinking only of the surface hurt—of what I've done to her in the eyes of the world, if this becomes known. Isn't that so?"

"Isn't it enough?"

"It is nothing!" came the vehement answer. "I would still have everything to regret if you had never married us—if Peter had never suspected us. You and Peter have only added to our tragedy!"

The clergyman was frankly puzzled.

"And what do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"I mean that fate had already trapped us before you and Peter got busy. Dorcas loves me—"

"Love!" broke in the minister. "You dare say it? You dare even think it?"

"I do! It is the only thing worth thinking of. That is the tragedy—the fact that we love each other. If we didn't, it would be simple—and no tragedy."

Mr. Beckwith fell to pacing the room with his short, nervous steps.

"Oh, come, come, this is asking too much of me! You are adding blasphemy to your other blunders!"

"What *you* are thinking—what Peter Stayton thought," expostulated Richard, "is blasphemy."



The clergyman came to a pause at the foot of the bed, his ruddy face blanched with anger.

"You—you say that? After—"

"Yes. I say it!" There was something terrifying in the wrath of that white face peering out of its heavy bandages. "You came up here this morning prepared to be magnanimous, to advise me and absolve me. I know you mean only to be kind and charitable; but I wouldn't have come here if I hadn't known you to be understanding, as well."

"Man, man, I may be all those things—I hope I am—yet here I'm confronted with a monstrous situation—a man bound to one woman in the holy bonds of matrimony, and protesting his love for another woman! I came up here prepared to find you contrite, amenable, and I find you contentious, defiant, boasting of emotions you have no right to feel. You've betrayed every law of decency!"

"No!" interrupted Richard swiftly. "The laws I have betrayed—if I have betrayed any—are those of my own conscience. I would never have betrayed the laws of men, if it had not been for Peter's suspicions and your credence of them."

"But you loved her before the wedding—you've told me so!"

"My one offense. God knows it was my only offense. I was going away—I had written her my farewell."

"But you submitted to that unlawful ceremony!"

"How could I do otherwise? In his mad frenzy Peter would have killed us both. We would have died a guilty pair, in the eyes of the world. You must surely understand my motive! I had to live to see that Dorcas was vindicated." He laughed grimly. "Can't you see how much easier, how much simpler, it would have been for me to die than to have to live, knowing that we could never belong to each other? But I had unwittingly sullied her, in the eyes of your lewd-minded world. I had to live to see that her name was cleared."

"All this may be very true, and very beautiful and romantic," said the clergyman dryly; "but it is beside the point."

"It is the point!" Richard insisted obstinately. "You can't help us, as I know you want to do, unless you know, first—well, a doctor can't help his patient until he knows where the trouble lies. Dorcas loves me!" He breathed the words forth

like a solemn incantation. "She must know that I proved myself worthy of her love, that while I may have appeared to fail her, I was thinking only of her. She must know that I love her better than my life. You can't help her or comfort her, unless you can make her believe this!"

Mr. Beckwith looked steadily down at the white, bruised face against the pillows. The sturdy foundation of his religious structure was assailed by this heretical insurrection, which seemed to spring from something so profound, so tender, that his protests lost themselves in a maze of uneasy doubt.

"And are you commissioning me with these messages for Dorcas?" he inquired unsteadily.

Richard nodded.

"And do you know that this love you profess is a dishonorable one?"

"As you see it, yes," admitted Richard, and sank back against the pillows. "To me it is a holy and sacred thing. It has shrived me."

He closed his eyes to shut out the bright glare of the room, but the blithe music of birds and of children's voices rode in at the open windows. He was conscious—as he had been the morning before, when he had stood with Dorcas on the tower balcony—of the chilly solitude of grief. It was as if all the vital forces of nature formed a conspiracy of indifference toward sorrow, as a self-protective measure.

When he opened his eyes, he found the grave eyes of Mr. Beckwith upon him.

"Then," the clergyman said gently, "supposing I accede to your request, supposing I withhold my own advice, have you a course of action planned?"

Richard nodded, his long forefinger tracing a pattern on the white counterpane.

"I am going back to town, of course; but, before I go, I must be sure that Dorcas will not leave her father and her home. I can't go away feeling that she is estranged from him through me. I can't think of her as homeless."

Mr. Beckwith said thoughtfully, and with something of the anxiety gone out of his face:

"I think I can arrange things between Dorcas and her father. I'm glad that you seem to realize so clearly that it's best for you to go."

A slight smile curled the younger man's lips.

"To go!" he echoed. "I've known that I must go, ever since the moment that I knew I loved her. I should have gone two days ago, if it hadn't been for my hospitable host. Now"—he lifted his hand and let it fall—"it is still the only way I can serve her. I must live for her—and without her!"

The clergyman's eyes were misty. His fingers beat a nervous tattoo on the foot-board of the bed as he stood there.

"She's waiting for me—in the tower," Richard said, after a moment. "I told her that I would come back—that she must wait; but you see I couldn't go back like this, and have her ask me how it happened. She mustn't know, of course, about that—about last night; but she *must* know that I stayed away for her sake."

"She shall, lad. And what shall I tell her—from you?"

Richard's eyes wandered to the window, to a ragged scroll of maple leaves against a blue patch of sky.

"That I love her, that her love is the most precious thing that has ever come into my life, and that all my years shall be so many prayers for her happiness!"

The clergyman nodded gravely, his eyes on the protruding blue welt on Richard's cheek bone.

"I'll tell her," he promised.

"And, if you'll be so good, please call up my lawyer's office in New York and ask for Billings—Horace Billings. Tell him where I am, and ask him to get hold of my man and send my car out for me to-day. I shall appreciate it immensely."

Mr. Beckwith lifted his hands in protest.

"To-day! Surely you're not going to try to get away to-day? Not in this shape!"

"Oh, I'm equal to the trip," Richard assured him wearily. "The sooner I get away, the better."

"But to-day! My soul, man, give your wounds a chance to heal! I shouldn't be easy about you if I let you run off like this! As to getting away for her sake—no one knows you're here, and no one shall know it. This shall be your sanctuary. Come, stay until to-morrow, anyway!"

"Well, then, to-morrow," Richard acquiesced dully; "if you are sure that my presence here can be kept secret."

"Nothing surer," the clergyman assured him. "I'll speak to Mrs. Mills—she's discretion personified. And now, before I run

down to see Peter Stayton, I'll put in that phone call—Billings, you say the name is?"

### XXIII

"LIFE'S a damned queer proposition, anyway, isn't it, Ches?"

Horace Billings fitted the telephone receiver into its hook and swung his chair about. His partner, standing at gaze near the window, nodded moodily.

"I suppose 'queer' is as good a word as any, if it accounts for Dick's calling at this particular moment—or whoever it was that did call."

"A clergyman," Billings explained.

"Didn't know Dick was very long on religion! Did you find out just what the trouble was?"

"With Dick? He wasn't precise—said something about an accident."

"Dick's laid up?"

"So it seems."

Chester Newell turned back to the window, to the insensate huddle of masonry spilled between the beetling office window and the frayed ribbon of the East River. A sultry mist of smoke and fog wrapped itself about the forked peaks of skyscrapers, and the ceaseless fret of traffic in the streets below came up like the rasp of a phonograph record before the tune begins.

"Queer!" he mused. "Not much of a word, but it 'll do. First the cablegram from Paris—then an old boy up in the backwoods phoning in about Dick!"

"Not a quarter of an hour apart," supplemented his partner gloomily, as he shook a cigarette out of its paper crypt. "I thought at first that the old boy—whoever he is—was going to tell me that Dick, too, was—well, nothing would have surprised me after that cable."

"Where is Dick, anyway?"

"Place called Standish, somewhere up on the Sound. First I've known where he was since he left town, except that I knew he hadn't gone with Della. And now—"

"I wonder"—the young lawyer's voice came thoughtfully from the window—"just how much he's going to care!"

"Dick—about Della? Do you need to wonder, Ches? He didn't go across with her, but apparently *somebody* did. No reason that I can see why *he* shouldn't have gone, except the obvious one—that he didn't want to!"

Chester Newell said musingly, after a moment:

"Of course, I've always—as they say in the movies—known that Dick's marriage hadn't been performed in the proper locality—heaven, I mean; but he's so darned decent, he never would make a subject for a comic strip."

"No, you can't tell much about Dick. He's like an old-fashioned watch—the kind with the closed case, that you broke your thumb nail trying to open. When he left here, last spring, I wanted to brain him. 'See that my wife's allowance is deposited regularly,' he said. 'Hold my mail, or open it if it looks urgent. Do anything you like except try to find me.' 'Where the blazes are you going, anyway?' I asked him. He smiled—you know Dick's smile. 'I'm going off somewhere to check up,' he said. Cryptic, wasn't it? Sounded like an expert accountant. Then he gave me power of attorney, and skipped."

Newell bobbed his head thoughtfully.

"It sounds like the sort of thing old Dick would do—and say. He always struck me like a man who went through life looking for something he'd lost." He smiled grimly. "And now he pops up in a little hick town, all shot up by something or other. What do you suppose happened—motor accident?"

"He didn't take a car. That's what he wants now. I've got to get hold of his man and send one up. Poor devil!"

They lapsed into a gloomy silence, invaded now by the staccato click of typewriters in the outer offices.

"Funny!" Billings said, and pounded the glowing tip of his cigarette in the ash tray. "Funny we should talk about Dick—after that cablegram!"

Newell shook his head.

"Not funny at all," he contended. "That's finished—poor old Dick isn't, I hope."

"The consul wanted to know Dick's wishes in regard to the *bodies*. You noticed the use of the plural, I suppose?"

"Yes, I noticed," Newell admitted dryly. "Have you any suspicion as to who the man was?"

"Well, he was an American—we know that much, and we knew Della. It might have been any of a dozen, but more than likely it was Hal Dubose. He went across, I know. They hadn't identified him yet, but I'll lay you a moderate wager—"

"No, you won't—not on that. Hal was Dick's pet hate, wasn't he?" Billings nod-

ded. "It'll make a pretty headline, that! Well, the poor fool paid a stiff price—"

"In advance, probably," broke in Billings, "if I knew Della. She was a hard one."

He turned back to his desk and reached for the telephone, while his partner started glumly for his own office.

"It's a good thing," Newell said, "that the preacher chap got his news off his chest before you had a chance to spring yours. You didn't give him a hint that anything was wrong here, did you?"

"Nary a hint," rejoined Billings, and spoke into the transmitter.

"Get me Richard Sells's house—Madison Avenue."

He replaced the receiver, and spoke over his shoulder to Newell.

"I'd have hated like the deuce to spring a thing like that over the phone, anyway. It's all over—he can't help, and the body won't be here for at least a week. Plenty of time to break it to him when he gets back."

"Plenty of time, God knows!" agreed Newell, and let himself into his own office.

"Now you just lie there and take things easy," Mr. Beckwith briskly advised Richard, bouncing back into the room. Something of his old cheerful pomposity had returned, as if to combat the alien gloom that had threatened his sturdy optimism. "I got Mr. Billings on the phone, and everything's all right—quite all right. He expressed his sympathy and sent his greetings. He'll have your man and your car down here to-morrow."

Richard turned his head on the pillow and summoned the smile that the little clergyman had hoped for.

"Thanks! It's good of you to take so much trouble. They had nothing of importance to report, I suppose?"

"Nothing whatever, boy. And now, if you're comfortable, I'll drop down to Peter Stayton's and see if I can drive a little screw into his obstinate skull. You'll feel better when that is straightened out, I know. I feel sure that I shall have comforting news for you when I get back."

He hurried toward the door and opened it on the plump little housekeeper, whose hand had been lifted to knock.

"Well, well, Mrs. Mills! You've come for the tray, I suppose."

"There's a caller for you, doctor," she



announced, with a compassionate glance toward the bed. "She's waiting down in the parlor. She asked me to tell you that she was in a great hurry. It's Cap'n Stayton's daughter, Dorcas."

The name filled the room like a vibrant tone as the housekeeper moved toward the small table, set the empty coffee cup on the tray, and folded the napkin.

"It don't look as if you ate much breakfast," she reproved Richard kindly, and picked up the tray.

"Just a minute, Mrs. Mills!" The clergyman's voice was sharp. "Leave that for a little while, will you?"

"Leave it?"

It was plain that the command was an assault on the housekeeper's domestic rubrics. Mr. Beckwith closed the door softly, and lowered his voice.

"You didn't happen to mention to Dorcas that I wasn't alone—that any one was here?"

She regarded him in reproachful surprise.

"No, I never thought to mention it, doctor. Of course not!"

"Well, that's good! I might have known that I could depend upon you—not that it's important. Still"—his manner took her into his confidence—"I had meant to ask you not to mention it to any one."

"But, of course, I—"

"Of course you wouldn't," he said hurriedly; "and also, of course, I shouldn't bind you to silence without an excellent reason."

"I know that, doctor."

"Well, then, since I'm notorious for the excellence of my health, perhaps you'd better not take that tray past the parlor door until our caller downstairs has left."

The affection that the energetic clergyman sowed so lavishly around him came to full florescence, for an instant, in his housekeeper's eyes. Then she patted the immaculate little apron that hung across the generous expanse of black alpaca like a minute label on a large bundle, and looked the importance she had been made to feel.

"Shall I tell her you'll be down soon?" she asked.

"If you please," he said, and held the door for her before he closed it gently and turned back to Richard.

Save for the blue welts beneath the wounded man's eyes, face and bandages and pillows had merged into a blur of white. Mr. Beckwith crossed slowly to the bed.

"She has come here, you see!"

Richard's hands were clawing at the counterpane.

"Here!" he whispered. "She has come here! She knows, then, that I'm here!"

"That doesn't follow," the clergyman said thoughtfully. "I don't see how she could know it. It's scarcely possible."

"And if—if she asks?"

"God forbid that! But if she does ask, I shall rely upon her to show something of your own courage." He walked to the window, his hands twisting behind his back. "This is very terrible—very terrible!"

"Here—so close!" murmured Richard.

It brought the minister back to the bed, a latent apprehension in his eyes.

"My dear man, I know it is hard, but,"—he spoke harshly—"if you weaken, if you make your presence here known, I shall have to withdraw from this whole affair. I shall have to make the fact of your bigamy known, and take my own share of the consequences. Keep that in mind, and remember what it would do to her!"

Richard's white lips pinched together. He closed his eyes.

"You may trust me. She must believe that I have already gone."

"Good!"

The minister started resolutely toward the door.

"Wait! Will you leave it open a little, so that I—I can hear her voice?"

The entreaty hung for a moment in the heavy silence.

"I put you on your honor, boy," the clergyman said, and went out, leaving the door ajar.

#### XXIV

MR. BECKWITH'S parlor had the stiff, prim look of having only just emerged from the capable ministrations of his plump housekeeper. Dorcas sat on a straight-backed chair, her face very pale, her gloves twisted into a string in her nervously moving fingers. She did not move when the clergyman came into the room, but her eyes fastened eagerly on his.

He assumed his breeziest manner as he hurried across the room to her, with both hands outstretched.

"Well, well, Dorcas, my dear! I'm highly honored! And how are you this beautiful day?"

He drew a chair close to her own, while the significance of the dark frock and hat,

and of the bulky suit case beside her, added a new terror to those he already faced. He covered her hands with his own and patted them gently.

"Now we're all comfortable, and I haven't seen you smile yet! Come, come, a little smile isn't going to incriminate you!"

She dropped her eyes and said, with the meticulous care of a child reciting a well learned lesson:

"Mr. Beckwith, I'm going away. I wanted to tell you, because—"

"Because"—he took the word from her eagerly—"because you would naturally tell me, as your friend and as your mother's—friend—because you are so sure of my disinterested love for you—isn't that it?"

"Yes," she acquiesced gravely; "because of those things, and because you married Richard and me, and because you liked him—"

"Who wouldn't?" broke in the clergyman heartily. It brought a fleeting glow to her eyes. "But, my dear child," he hurried on, "you say you are going away! Now that's no sort of an announcement to make to *me*! I want to know why, and where and for how long—all about it, in fact."

He placed her palms together and held them in his own warm clasp. She looked up at him and shook her head doubtfully.

"I think you already know the answer to all those questions." As he made a sharp exclamation of denial, she added: "You haven't asked me about Richard."

He thumped his knee mightily.

"To be sure I haven't! Just shows what a blundering old idiot I am. Well—"

"Oh, you don't need to do that," she broke in quickly. "I know, Mr. Beckwith, I know! I know that you know—something!"

His face sobered. Free of the necessity to dissemble, he found a certain relief in that tragic avowal.

"And how, Dorcas, child, did you know that I knew something?"

"I'm a woman," she told him simply. "Your eyes told me when you first came into the room." Then she leaned forward, her young face suddenly old. "Tell me what has happened to him! Where is he?"

He left her there and went over to the window, bereft of words, surprised to find that the props which had served him for so long, which had sustained him in so many

emergencies, had failed him now. What was there in his beatific repertoire of words that he could say to this stricken girl, whose grief had sprung from such a maze of fatal circumstances? It was as difficult to comfort her, he reflected dismally, as to trace the grim trail that had led to her present unhappiness.

He went back to her, after a moment, with the consoling thought that at least she did not know that Richard was there—in his house.

"My dear child, you are right. I do know—about you and Richard."

"I'm glad of that," she said. "And if you know that, won't you tell me where he is now?"

The clergyman shook his head sadly.

"I'm sorry to hear you ask that question, Dorcas."

"Because you won't tell me. You're sorry, because you feel that you can't tell me—is that it?"

"Not entirely." He spoke gently. "I'm sorry you asked me, because it isn't what I had hoped from you, because you—"

"Because you think I have no right to ask—because you think I'm wicked in wanting to know where he is!" She got up quickly, her eyes hard and bright. "That's what you think, isn't it? You think I should remember that I have no right to—to anything concerning him. Well, you're wrong! I'm going!"

For a moment he was too much astonished by her sudden outburst to do more than stare stupidly at her. Then he sprang after her, and took the suit case, which she had picked up, out of her hand.

"Going? You're going to do nothing of the kind! My dear child, you've put words in my mouth that weren't there! Come, now—you wouldn't treat me like this! You came to me as a friend, and you are treating me like an enemy." She shook her head slowly. "Ah, but you are!"

"I only came," she said dully, "because I thought that perhaps Richard might have come to you. Now that I see he isn't here, there's nothing else for me to stay for." Her lips curled in a cynical smile. "I didn't come for sympathy or advice."

In the white, bitter face, in the twitching lips, in the disillusionment of her young eyes, he found no resemblance to the child who had made her marriage vows so valiantly forty-eight hours before. A panic seized him.

"But you can't unmake a friendship in that high and mighty manner, my dear! You can't run away like this!"

She challenged him abruptly.

"Will you tell me about him?"

"As much as I can, child—as much as I can!" he promised frantically. "Sit down again, dear, sit down!"

She obeyed, but still her eyes and lips were cynical.

"You will tell me just as much as you think good for me," she said.

"And for *him*," he added gravely.

"Oh, no!" she said. "That won't be necessary. How do you know what is good for him?"

He threw up his hands in a gesture of dismay, of thwarted intention.

"Come, now, you're making it very hard for me—and I am so anxious to help."

"Help?" she echoed.

"Exactly," he said, patting her arm. "Here you are in a terrible position. You have been made wretched through no fault of your own. Oh, I *know* that! And don't think I blame you; but don't you see how much worse this thing might have been?"

"You're going to tell me about the silver lining," she said harshly.

"Precisely," he agreed. "You're in a dark cloud, I know—darker than most; but you must try to find the silver lining. It's there."

"Yes?" she helped him coldly. "Yes?"

"For example, I have as yet filed no record of this marriage. No one knows that it took place. There's a ray of light for you! Richard was a fine young man—partly at fault, no doubt, but honorable and very fine. If he had been otherwise, it would have been a sad story indeed!" He paused for a moment, trying to look the optimism he was simulating, yet appalled at the empty sound of the words. "There is a certain beauty, the beauty of sacrifice and tenderness, that robs this affair of much of its apparent evil."

"I see!" she said dispassionately. "And is that all you have to tell me?"

He laid a supplicating hand over hers.

"My dear, you mustn't speak like that! Is that all? No! The point is, are you going to rob this thing of its better side? Are you going to let it make you bitter?"

"Bitter!" she repeated reflectively. "It has made me wiser."

His spirits lifted at the quiescent tone.

"Of course it has; and I'm glad you

came to me, though I was coming down to have a talk with you—to tell you that I knew all about it from Richard's own lips."

"But you didn't come to tell me where he had gone, or how badly he had been hurt—physically!"

His eyes narrowed.

"Physically, my dear?"

"Oh!" she said, with a weary shrug. "I know that father struck him. I don't see why you should pretend ignorance."

"My dear little girl, I'm sorry—sorry that you had to know that!"

"It was—just something else," she said.

In his nervous quest for words, he went back to the window, and stood looking wretchedly out on the quiet street with its protective canopy of maples. Her voice followed him, muffled, half inaudible.

"Was he hurt badly?"

He swung about and back to her side again.

"Hurt, yes, but not so badly that he won't be all right presently."

She was twisting her gloves again in an agony of suppressed eagerness.

"And you saw him? He came to you, instead of to me? I waited for him—waited all night!"

"He only came to me, Dorcas, because he saw how futile it would be for him to go back to you. He wanted to spare you any more suffering. He did the right thing in coming to me, and he bequeathed me the precious burden he had no right to assume. It was a fine sacrifice on his part, my dear."

"Yes!" She had lapsed again into her languid apathy. "Yes, I expect it was fine, as you call it." Once more she got up and stooped for her suit case. "Well, then, I'm going."

"Oh, no—not like this!" He caught her arm. "You're not going, to run off when there's so much still unsaid!"

"But I don't want to hear any more. I'm going."

"Well, then"—he was working desperately against time—"wait, and I'll take you home."

She smiled wanly.

"You know I'm not going home, Mr. Beckwith."

"Pooh, pooh! I know you *are*. You haven't heard me out yet. There's Richard's message—"

"Message?" she repeated, and again more shrilly: "Message? For me?"



"For whom else?"

"Then tell me, tell me what it is!"

He wagged his finger at her.

"I'll reserve it until we get home."

"But I've told you I'm not going home!"

"Then where are you going?"

She faced him steadily, the suit case still dragging from her slender fingers, her face as devoid of color as of emotion.

"I'm going to Richard," she said quietly.

He stared blankly at her, his brows puckered like a puzzled child's, his head tilted slightly sidewise. In that moment he was aware of an overwhelming impotence, and sent up a swift, desperate prayer for help. Gently he laid his hand on her arm.

"Dorcas, Dorcas, my dear, you can't know what you're saying!"

She looked down at his restraining fingers with a sort of detached interest.

"Ah, but I do, and I mean what I say. I'm going to Richard—to belong to him."

In his extremity Mr. Beckwith resorted to strategy.

"Well, then, suppose you tell me why you've made this decision! You must remember that I am your friend. I was your mother's friend. It's due me to know a little more of this, don't you think? You see"—he smiled appealingly into the girl's eyes—"I'm putting it on the basis of friendship."

As he talked, he was drawing her gently back to her chair. She sank into it with a troubled little sigh.

"That's right! You wouldn't run away like that from me, without telling me more about it!"

"But what do you want me to say?"

"Say!" He wagged his head incredulously. "Say! After making an announcement like that!"

"I suppose it sounds very wicked, to you."

His energetic grunt denied this.

"I'm just interested to know why you've made up your mind to do it, when you know—"

"That Richard is married—to some one else?" She folded her hands in her lap and studied her fingers thoughtfully. "Well, then, I'm going because I love him, because we were meant to belong to each other, and because he needs me."

The little clergyman's years, so successfully held at bay by his hardy buoyancy, overpowered him now. He seemed very old and gray.

"But, dear girl, though all this may be quite true, are these sufficient reasons for you to make yourself an outcast?"

"Yes," she said evenly. "You see, I'm already an outcast in father's eyes. I should be in every one's, if people knew about this. Father called me a wanton." The clergyman covered his eyes with a shaking hand, but she went on drearily: "Do you think I would stay in his house after that?"

"But, Dorcas, you must make allowances. He didn't understand. He is your father—"

"No!"

"Your father," Mr. Beckwith persisted. "His love for you distorted his vision. Then, too, you must consider his age. Youth must be generous to age. Your father was half mad with grief."

"Perhaps," she agreed readily enough; "but I would rather die than go back. I'm going to Richard!"

The dispassionate finality of her tone chilled him. He searched feverishly for a word, a phrase, that might move her.

"And do you realize fully what you are doing? Have you thought of the consequences? You are going to live—as his wife, I gather—with a married man. You know what Jesus said of that?"

"Yes," she said, "I know."

"And you are quite prepared to break that law?"

"Law!" she cried harshly. "Do you think your talk of laws can impress me—now? My own father has just shown me how little they mean—these laws of yours. He didn't hesitate to break them. Why should I? There's a law that reads, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged'!" Her voice lifted triumphantly. "Well, father judged me, without a hearing. After he had forced Richard to marry me, in order to make me pure according to his standards, he advised me to break my marriage vows—to desert the man he thought was my lawful husband. That's how much he respected your laws!"

She stopped to challenge him, her cheeks crimson, her eyes hard, her mouth set mutinously.

"Oh, no, your laws can't frighten me now!" she went on. "They are so many hypocrisies—made to be broken when it suits our convenience. My father broke those that suited him—I shall break those that suit me!"

He broke in desperately.

"But, Dorcas, it is not so simple as that! The fact that your father erred is no reason why you should."

"Oh, but it is!" she declared vehemently. "He showed me what sort of things these laws were—how mean and lewd and petty. He broke the laws of God in deference to the laws of man. You may smile, but you see I've thought it all out. When I go to Richard, I only break the laws of man, for I know that our love is sacred. I didn't *will* to love Richard—it just came into my heart. Who put it there?" She was like a jubilant child, exulting in some new-found prowess. "I would have given Richard up gladly, you see; but why should I sacrifice our happiness to uphold laws that are so mean? My father is a Christian, but he has acted like a beast!"

The youth of her, her hot rebellion against the incomprehensible enginery of life, tore at Mr. Beckwith's heart. He could see her through those dark hours while she waited for Richard, wandering through the bleak labyrinth of inconsistencies into which this experience had thrown her. And how was she to find her way bereft of faith—without the philosophic torch of life? How would his divine props serve him now, when, in her disillusionment, she swept them so ruthlessly aside?

How combat the forces of her newborn skepticism, save with the only weapons she did not scorn. His pulses were beating hard, but he nodded thoughtfully, as if considering the things she had said.

"I see the way you feel. I might have known you wouldn't make such a decision without excellent reasons." He bent forward and laid his hand over hers. "But you've thought of Richard, too, of course?"

"Of Richard!" she echoed sharply. "Of course—of Richard, first of all!"

"Then of course you have considered what this will mean to him?"

"He needs me," she said hotly. "I shall take care of him and make him happy!"

"Not if I know Richard," he said, not ungently.

Her eyes were startled and resentful.

"But I know him!"

"You know, then, that he is as sensitive as he is loyal—his life proves how loyal. He has been loyal to his marriage vows all these years, when they have brought him nothing but unhappiness. He was so loyal to his love for you that from the first he

gave you up. His message to you is significant of him."

"His message!"

Mr. Beckwith nodded, ignoring her swift eagerness.

"He said that I was to tell you that he loved you, that all his years would be so many prayers for your happiness."

The light that came into her eyes dazzled him, but he continued evenly:

"You see, from the first, Richard has known that he could not claim you. Still, he was fine enough to be willing to give you up. He told himself that he had found and loved a pure woman who had loved him. It gave him a staff that would have served him all his life. Having to make the sacrifice made him strong, but now—"

He stopped there, hoping for some response from her, but she was very still.

"You know, I suppose, the effect your decision will have on him. You will go to him and say, 'We love each other—let us belong to each other! Let us defy all the laws of God and man, for these laws are not so strong or so good as our love!' And his love for you will have made him vulnerable. He will be convinced—for a little while. Then, presently, the world will hear of it, and the beauty of your love will be spoiled and ruined by scandal."

"Do you think that matters to me?" she said defiantly.

"No," he admitted thoughtfully; "but perhaps Richard's faith is stronger than yours. Perhaps he believes that whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her."

The hot color rushed into her cheeks, but he went on, still without heat, as if he were ruminating aloud to himself:

"You will have burdened Richard with that sin. A man of lesser principles might not consider it a burden, but Richard wouldn't so readily have given you up, if he had not believed it wrong to keep you. All his life he will know that he dragged you down from the high place his love made for you. He will know that he has made you a target for the scandal-mongers, a correspondent in a sordid divorce action. Of course, you won't care, but it seems pretty clear to me that Richard does not share your—er—courageous viewpoint. I'm afraid that instead of his love for you being the beautiful and spiritual memory that it is now, it will soon have become a very earthly reality—just another dead ideal."

He sighed resignedly, still uncertain of the effect his words were having upon her, for her head was bent, her eyes were on her clasped hands in her lap.

"But of course you have considered all these things. You are willing that he should pay the price, since you are so certain that *you* will not."

Somewhere in the house a clock struck hollowly. A sprinkling of perspiration beaded the little parson's forehead. At last the girl spoke without lifting her eyes.

"You're trying to tell me that he will only learn to hate me!" Then, with a rasping cry: "Oh, life is terrible—terrible! Why did this have to happen to me? What shall I do?"

The cry brought him to his feet and close beside her. He drew her head against him and cuddled it in his arms, while his heart beat out a psalm of gratitude.

"Do, my child! Hasn't the man you love pointed the way? Let this experience of yours be your torch, too. Keep it lit with the purity of your heart and soul, and you will never learn to hate it. If you have lost your faith in everything else, you still have faith in him; and he has left you in my charge."

"But what shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?"

He saw the great wet drops gather one by one on her locked hands, and knew that at last she was crying.

"Dorcas, dear, you know what is best for you to do. You must let me take you home."

"Home?" She bounded from her chair and faced him, with her cheeks glistening, though her eyes were suddenly dry and wild. "Home, after what my father has done to me? Do you think I would?"

"I'm sure you will. It was Richard's wish."

"No, no—I can't! I hate my father! I told him I never wanted to see him again, and I meant it. I hate him!"

"But you'll go back, because it is what Richard wanted."

"No, no!"

"Ah!" said the clergyman sadly. "Pride, my dear! I thought you were too brave for that."

She was sobbing again now, warding him away from her with outflung arms, as if she feared he would move her by force.

"I tell you I hate my father!"

"You will love him as you never loved

him, Dorcas," he told her gently. She shook her head incredulously. "You've never had to forgive him before, and you will love him in proportion to the amount you forgive. You remember who said, 'To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.'"

He took possession of her hands once more, and she clung to him, stripped of her resistance, sensible of her inability to cope with the inscrutable paradoxes of fate. As he soothed her, Mr. Beckwith's thoughts flew to Richard, who had pleaded to hear her voice, and, hearing it, had found the courage to withstand its appeal. The clergyman made a silent obeisance.

"You must let me take charge now," he said resolutely. "I am going to take you home, and I am going to settle things between you and your father, my dear. Come along!"

She stopped for a moment at the foot of the stairs, while she dabbed at her eyes with a wet handkerchief. Upstairs, Richard, his clothes flung hastily on, slunk away from his open door and sank on his knees beside the corded bed.

Between him and the girl he loved there lay a short flight of stairs, down which crawled a strip of gay carpet—"hit-and-miss" carpet, Mrs. Mills had assured the minister, was its proper title. If there was a grim symbolism in this, there was none there to descry it—save, perhaps, that inimitable practical joker, fate.

## XXV

PERHAPS Henri Deffand would have approved of that same practical joker's impartial methods if he had been sounded on the subject. He might have observed with a shrug—for he was something of a philosopher—that it was indeed an ill wind that blew no one any good. Certainly the circumstances warranted the observation, for when Henri returned from Paris to his native village, the eminence attained by the ambitious Jules suffered a temporary eclipse.

Instead of a seat in a third-class carriage of the capricious *chemin de fer* linking that remote corner of Brittany with the French metropolis, Henri rode into town like some official potentate in the tonneau of a smart and fabulously expensive limousine. True, the limousine was not Henri's, but the hauteur he borrowed from its grandeur might have deceived the casual observer, and the



aroma of the fine cigar between his lips enhanced his air of importance.

When the car came to a pause outside the *mairie*, Henri was the first to descend, elaborately unconscious of the gaping mouths and lifted brows in his vicinity, elaborately condescending to the well tailored young man who followed him. The *maire*, who had been peeping through the closed blinds of one parlor window while his wife utilized the other for the same purpose, went hurriedly to the door, pulling his vest into place as he went.

"I'm back, you see," announced Henri largely. "This is M. Gray, who has come from the American consul."

A splendid ceremony of introduction followed, but the American clipped short the suave preliminaries that threatened to keep him away from Paris for a longer period than was convenient.

"I've come to verify the facts with which M. Deffand was good enough to acquaint us," he announced pleasantly.

The *maire* bowed solemnly, in deference to the tragic implication of the words.

"Ah, my friend, it was very sad!"

"Very," agreed the American briskly. "We have succeeded in identifying the unfortunate lady who—"

"It was no simple matter," broke in Henri, slightly injured that the announcement had been taken from him.

"It was a matter of tact and resource," the visitor agreed, and smiled upon the disgruntled emissary. "M. Deffand possesses both of these qualities, fortunately. He discovered that the lady's name was Mrs. Sells, but her companion remains unidentified as yet."

"We thought—my wife thought—that he might have been her husband," offered the *maire* hopefully.

"No—she was traveling alone." The *maire* sighed at that, and Henri's brows lifted. "I'd like to get a glimpse of the car, and to have a word with the doctor and with any one else who knows anything about the affair. I should like to have a few more details, you see."

"You've only to find Jules Kermadec," the *maire* told him. "He will be on the beach at this hour, doubtless. If you'll just come with me—"

Their progress through the narrow street was in the nature of a cumulative procession. The venerable *gendarme*, still mildly indignant that an affair of such violence

should have occurred in his vicinage, joined them and protested plaintively:

"The way is clearly marked, *monsieur*. Me, I am unable to comprehend how it was they failed to see the signboard."

"Going sixty and drunk, probably," muttered the American, in English.

Henri nodded wisely, although his knowledge of the language did not extend beyond "mister" and "yes."

The little doctor, who was sipping a glass of *vin ordinaire*, cautiously watered, before the Café of the Small Turtle, contributed his meager addition to the evidence, and joined the procession. It was his opinion, he said, that the sun had blinded the man at the wheel.

"The sun was in the act of setting, *monsieur*, and they were directly facing it, you understand."

On the beach, Jules, who had been duly warned of the approaching cortège by his loyal partisans, was beautifully unconscious of its approach until the procession was fairly upon him. He bore the introduction with a good deal of reserve, and stertorously announced, at the end of it, that he, Jules Kermadec, had been the only eyewitness of the tragic affair.

"Alas, *monsieur*!" he said, and the pupils of his eyes disappeared beneath the lids as he spoke. "I saw the whole thing. It was very terrible! Like a blue comet out of the heavens it came!"

"Ahem! Yes—do you recall the time, by any chance?"

Interrupted in his eloquence, Jules regarded the American reproachfully.

"And do you think I could forget?" he demanded. "I had just beached my boat. It had been a poor day. The devils of fish—"

"Yes, but the time?"

"As I was in the act of telling you, it was sunset."

"Precisely!" supplemented the doctor, and was promptly frowned upon by the fisherman.

"They came over the cliff. You shall see the exact spot, my friend. I saw at once they were doomed, though I cried out in warning, I shouted, I waved my arms—"

"You say you shouted?"

It was Henri Deffand who put the question. Jules whirled on him.

"But yes, as I am telling you. When the car fell"—he was addressing the American now—"I ran to it, and—"

"Ah, that is strange, my friend!" interrupted Henri gently. "My impression was that you ran *away*, still shouting—"

"For help," Jules finished severely. "Eager as I was to go to the assistance of the unfortunates, I recognized that I should be powerless to help. I ran calling for the doctor."

They had walked along the beach to where the broken swells lipped at the half buried wreckage of the car. Here they paused, while the visitor lit a cigarette and made his inspection.

"H-m, yes!" He was making notes with a slender gold pencil. "The car is done for. It must have come over those cliffs with a rush! There was no luggage of any sort?"

"The car was empty, save for the bodies," the doctor said.

"The road is clearly marked," the *gendarme* protested plaintively.

"Ah, but it is as I said—they were not looking at the road!"

Henri Deffand, who spoke, winked knowingly at the American.

"It is my opinion," Jules observed hardily, "that the man was already dead at the wheel."

"The cost of removing the *débris* will be high, *monsieur*," the *maire* suggested timidly. "The bodies are even now harbored in my house, where we took the liberty of offering prayers for their departed souls. The priest's fee—"

"We will attend to all these things," the American soothed him, and drew out a wallet. "*Madame's* husband is not poor, and I am convinced that he would not want these little kindnesses of yours to go unrewarded."

The *maire* made a feeble protesting gesture of hands and shoulders, while Henri threw a furtive glance at the richly packed wallet. Jules was moving his lips piously.

"For your trouble, *messieurs*—ah, but you must accept it in the name of the poor dead woman you befriended."

They took the bank notes from him—Henri with the grand manner of one receiving his just dues, the *gendarme* with a plaintive sigh, Jules reluctantly. A scattered audience along the top of the dunes watched the performance with unconcealed delight. The proprietor of the Café of the Small Turtle, who was among them, hurried off to clear his cluttered tables and refill his jugs.

The young American, whose thoughts had been peregrinating between his gloomy mission and a bright face in a certain studio on the Boulevard Raspail, looked at his watch.

"I'll take a look at the bodies, if you don't mind, and make arrangements for their removal. The Touraine sails from Havre on Saturday, and perhaps we can get them aboard her."

If the clink of convivial glasses and the chink of new silver money in the Café of the Small Turtle, that evening, was suggestive of a fête day, it was perhaps the most fitting tribute that the Breton village could have paid to Della Sells. Della had long ago gauged the efficacy of an adroit gratuitous expenditure, and so, perhaps, it was singularly appropriate that a cautious *post mortem* disbursement should commemorate her brief connection with the quaint little community.

## XXVI

WHEN he saw that Dorcas had indeed gone, Peter Stayton stumbled back into the kitchen and sat down before the stripped table, his eyes on the murky residue of coffee in the girl's half emptied cup.

The sea, still in the throes of reaction from the tempest, lay blue and demure, so that an odd quietude overhung the marsh meadows. The little black boy who, squatting in his swing, formed the pendulum of the clock on the mantel, seemed to realize that in all the silence, save for his activity, there was no evidence of the march of minutes. He seemed to put even more than his customary energy into his blithe task of beating the rhythm for that mute parade.

It seemed to Peter that he himself hung suspended in some vague interspace, where there was only the hot beat of drums in his ears and against his burning temples. Even the memory of that slender, dark-clad figure trudging up the road away from him failed to move him, so remote had it become. He was conscious of a tragic solitude that seemed to be pressing in upon him and smothering him.

When a step on the gravel path aroused him, he lifted his head, and for a long moment there was no recognition in his eyes as they rested on the figure of Rose Ruby. She stood just inside the door, regarding him half timidly, so that her smile was uncertain.

"How be ye this morning? Thought

I'd come over to see if ye wanted anything done."

He pushed the cup away with the lazy nonchalance of a man just finishing his breakfast, and swaggered across to her, fearful that she would notice his unsteady gait.

"Oh, it's *you!* Do I want anything done? Sure!" He was elaborately casual. "Sure! Come in an' get busy."

She peered eagerly about the room.

"They gone?" she whispered hoarsely.

"Gone! Who? Oh, them!" He laughed shortly. "Yes, they've gone. About time, I'd say. This ain't much of a place fer a honeymoon, is it now?"

She shook her head until her hair strung down over her eyes.

"Give *me* Coney Island," she said devoutly, and then, with a note of awe in her voice: "Mebbe that's where they went!"

"Mebbe," Peter concurred, and thrust his hands into his pockets, angered at the sudden blur before his eyes, at the sudden weakness of his knees and ankles. "Anyhow, now they've gone, you can get busy here, and set things to rights. You'd better clean up the tower room, and shut and lock the windows up there."

She nodded her willingness, and looked at the table speculatively.

"Don't look as if ye et much breakfast!"

"Didn't want much."

"When did they go?"

"Oh!" He shrugged. "Oh, early."

"Did he hire a cab fer her?"

"How do I know?"

She threw him a reproachful glance at that, and started to clear the table.

"I'll get ye a good dinner," she told him.

"The butcher comes by to-day. How'll a steak do?"

Inside his pockets his hands were doubled into tight knots, but he sat hard on his irritation.

"Oh, fine! A steak 'll do fine."

"Ye need it," she said knowingly, and nodded her head again. "Ain't nothin' like food to set a man up. Did she wear her best dress—the one she got up to New London?"

Peter knew, then, that he must get away from the sound of her voice, the piercing light of her little bright eyes, which seemed to pry clean through a man's body and soul, and the sight of her rusty skirt flapping about her wrinkled shoe tops. How could a man think with a witch cackling in

his ears? He had an impulse to shake her, and wondered, if he did so, whether she wouldn't fall apart like an ill made puppet.

"I'm goin' out in the skiff," he told her, without turning his head. "I'll be back fer dinner."

He started off across the lawn.

"Dinner 'll be ready come noon!" she called after him shrilly.

But he hurried on, his eyes leaping out to the vast blue solitude before him.

She watched him go, with a muttered imprecation against his unsociable conduct. Then she turned back to her work, humming a cracked tune.

She had been perfectly at home in the old house since before Dorcas had been born. Now she went capably to work, stripping the cloth from the table, scrubbing its hard deal surface, sweeping, dusting, watering the row of plants in the window. When she went to dust the mantel, where the old Colt still lay, she left the weapon in a little oasis of dust, for her fear of firearms was stronger than her housewifely conscience.

When she had laid a fire in the stove, ready for lighting, she went upstairs, armed with cleaning paraphernalia. She reached the landing outside the tower room, panting from the climb. Here she stood staring into the room, while her eyes widened with astonishment. She had expected to find the room quite empty, but she found, instead, a neat stack of hand luggage piled about an upended trunk in the center of the floor.

She was thrilled by this tangible evidence of the romance in which she had played such an important part. True, the fact that the bridal couple had left without luggage was an affront to her ideas of a romance; but as she went in she sniffed the odor of new leather that clung to the bags as if it were some magic perfume.

She propped her broom and mop against the wall, and stood delightedly over the heaped luggage. A few ragged labels clung to the sides of the trunk and suit case. After spelling them out laboriously, she concluded that they were "furrin." She rubbed her hands together with pleased excitement. Evidently the city man had been abroad. Unbelievable thought!

A brief case stood propped against the trunk. She stooped and picked it up, running her rough fingers over the smooth cowhide surface. Its shape was new to her, and she dimly wondered to what use such an odd bit of luggage might be put.



With a furtive glance toward the door, she unbuckled the straps, loosed the clasp, and peered in. Papers—neat little expensive-looking books with leather covers!

Rose Ruby had nourished her starved and avid affections too long on the emotional overflow of others to be hampered now by any finical scruples. Her ghoulish tendencies had been augmented by a long dearth of adventure in the village. It was with a sharp sucking in of breath that she peered in at the unexplored treasures of the brief case, before she began picking them out one by one and spreading them on her lap—envelopes—papers—letters typed and, as a consequence, easy to read:

DEAR SIR—The bond issue of the—

These she discarded. Romance did not express itself in such terms, according to Rose Ruby.

A flat red check book proved richer fare. There were figures here that spelled fabulous amounts, and gave her the same illicit thrill that she felt when a richly gowned movie star made her dazzling appearance upon the screen. The records opposite the figures opened a veritable *Ali Baba's* cave to her.

Club dues, taxes, repairs on car—so he had a car! Well, Dorcas *had* set herself in a butter tub! Servants, chauffeur—Rose Ruby was athrill now. Flowers—she sniffed at the word. Forty dollars for flowers! Well, what had she told Pete about these city men and women?

She flipped over another page, and hung breathlessly above the next entry:

Deposited to Della's account.

Della! Rose Ruby's withered cheeks were showing crimson spots. A thousand dollars to Della! She fairly rushed through the pages now, and found the same entry again:

Deposited to Della's account.

When she had plumbed the rich depths of the check book's revelations, there were little trickles of saliva at the corners of her mouth. She delved back into the bag. She was seeing the imaginary Della as a dark and fascinating Jezebel in all the glint and glitter of illicit jewels and guilty splendor.

There were more letters, as vague of meaning as they were clear of text. Out of one of these, as if it had been slipped in carelessly, dropped a heavy white envelope,

distinguished from its fellows by the fact that its address was scrawled in longhand. She spelled the address out arduously—"Mr. and Mrs. Richard Sells, 777 Madison Avenue, New York."

Once, twice, three times she read it, while her hand shook and her breath came raspingly. Then she slipped out the sheet of paper inside, and found it to be a wedding invitation, neatly engraved, and with that same incriminating script filling in the blank reserved for the guest's name.

Rose Ruby was in a frenzy now—a frenzy that hampered her as she crammed the papers back into the bag—the frenzy of one who, anticipating a spare meal of crumbs, had found a feast awaiting her. She was cunning enough, even in her eagerness, to replace the papers and books as she had found them—all save the square white envelope, which she thrust into the fusty bosom of her dress. Then she stumbled down the stairs, panting and gasping for breath, snatched her shawl from its hook, and hurried across the lawn toward the beach.

As she ran, she shaded her eyes with her hand, and peered out across the bland blue reaches of water. Half a dozen small boats chugged about, dragging nets, rebaiting and laying lobster pots. Anchored close to the rocky island lay a small skiff, its occupant angling for blackfish; but it was not Peter.

Irritated at not descrying the familiar skiff, she trudged up the sand to a stone jetty, once a wharf that stretched between the shore and the channel, now a crooked arm of black stones. Along this she picked her way to the very tip, intent on gaining an unobstructed view of the harbor, realizing that from this vantage point one might hail an incoming boat before it reached the shore. She selected a protruding rock and sat down gingerly, one hand making a shade above her eyes, the other clutching the shawl at her throat.

At her feet the water sucked in and out of the crevices between the rocks. Gulls and screeching kingfishers circled over her head, no more alert and eager to swoop down upon their prey than old Rose Ruby herself.

## XXVII

THE clergyman stopped his car before the big white house, hopped briskly out, and smiled encouragingly up at the girl.

"Come along, sister—there's a brave

girl! Hold up your little head—you've reason enough! Now, what did you pack in this bag, anyway—firearms or gold bricks?"

Their progress up the path was enlivened by his pleasantries, though in the bright sunlight his face looked very gray and haggard and his shoulders sagged wearily.

"You must let me have a little time alone with your dad, my dear. After that, everything is going to be all right—I'll guarantee it!"

They found the kitchen cool and dim after the bright glare outside, and permeated with the faint odor of yellow soap and moist wood. Mr. Beckwith looked about anxiously. The lethargy that had wrapped the girl since she had succumbed to his pleading seemed to have left her devoid of volition. She was like an automaton, moving only in response to his voice.

"Nobody home, I'm afraid," he said. "Sit down, child, while I take a peep around."

He went outdoors, peered into the garden, and strode across the lawn to the dozing Dorcas. Then he came back to the porch and raised his voice:

"Ahoy, Peter!"

After repeating the summons, he went back to the kitchen—to the girl sitting listlessly beside the table.

"Looks as if the ship had been abandoned," he said, with an attempt to be jocular. "That's a nice how-d'ye-do!"

For a moment he paced the kitchen nervously, angered that his plans had been balked, troubled by the thought of Richard, who must have heard something—if not all, indeed—of that tragic controversy, and who might forget his promise and follow Dorcas.

The clergyman was distressed, too, by the girl's utter exhaustion. Her white face and heavy eyes drew him to her side, and he patted her shoulder reassuringly.

"Come, come—brace up! How about going upstairs for a little rest, while I wait for your father? If I know anything about eyes, yours haven't been closed for a couple of nights!"

She shook her head weakly.

"Now don't wag that head at me!" he warned her. "What you need is sleep. Come along, just to please me—there's a good child!"

He drew her to her feet, and they went up the stairs hand in hand. When they

had reached the first landing, he turned toward the door of her room, but she went on. He followed, with a compassionate light in his eyes. At the door of the tower room, her lips lifted in a wan smile.

"I feel closer to him here," she said.

"So you do—and why not?" he rejoined heartily, and followed her inside.

She pointed to the neat stack of luggage.

"His things," she said.

Mr. Beckwith nodded, led her to the couch, and lifted off her hat.

"Now you just lie down there and let me sit beside you, as I used to do sometimes when you were a youngster. You're still *my* little youngster, you know! That's right! All comfortable?"

He patted her hand. She lay staring up at the ceiling, so colorless, so drained of her buoyancy and spirit, that the little parson's throat contracted as he looked down at her.

An enveloping silence settled down on the little room—the murmurous silence of an August morning, with its echoes of bird and insect activity, of droning voices blurred by distance.

The clergyman's eyes had wandered to the open window. When they came back to Dorcas, her eyes were closed, and her lashes were lying darkly against her white cheeks. A profound sigh voiced his relief. She had succumbed at last to nature's best soporific—exhaustion. All traces of her harrowing grief seemed to have been washed away. So untroubled and peaceful did she look that she might have been a child sung lovingly to sleep by a mother's lullaby.

He lingered for some moments before he left her, closing the door softly and tiptoeing down the stairs. He told himself that, once asleep, she would doubtless pay nature's full toll for those hideous nights, and would sleep for many hours.

Downstairs again, he paced back and forth in the big kitchen, pausing now and then to glance out across the lawn, toward the beach. The thought of Richard recurred to trouble him, and multitudinous neglected tasks weighed on his mind. Where was Peter? How long would Richard wait? How dependable was his endurance? How much had he heard of the girl's heart-rending words?

At last, driven to a panic of nervous anxiety, he climbed the tower stairs again, and looked in at the sleeping girl, who did not stir at the sound of his steps. Then he hurried down and out of the back door.

If Peter Stayton was fishing or lobstering, it was unlikely that he would return before noon—as unlikely as that the girl would wake. The clergyman could get to Richard and back again, he told himself, as he strode down the path, before either of these things could happen. He climbed into his little car and swung it around toward the village.

A dozen times he had glanced toward the beach, a dozen times his eyes had passed over the wavering fringes of the stone jetty, but the black dot that was Rose Ruby was so still, and merged so imperceptibly into the rocks about her, that she had formed only a part of the inanimate view. Patience, born of the rich significance of her discovery, sustained her in her tireless vigil. The climbing sun scorched her wizened face and struck through her wispy hair to prick her scalp with myriad hot-pointed needles, but she was insensible to everything save the leaping expectancy within her.

When she finally caught sight of Peter's skiff, she stood up and waved her scrawny arm frantically long before he could have distinguished her figure. As he drew closer, her signals became still more frantic. The breeze caught her shawl and billowed it out behind her like a distorted hump.

When she saw that his unhurried strokes were bringing him at a snail's pace, she lifted her voice and hailed him shrilly. The sound carried to him like the shriek of some fiendish prophet. She saw him bend swiftly over his oars. When he was opposite the jetty, he called to her:

"What's the matter with you?"

She beckoned to him furiously. He pulled in close to the rocks and peered up at her anxiously.

"Git out!" she commanded. "I got somethin' to tell ye!"

Something in her wild manner, in the convulsive working of her mouth and her gesticulating arms, filled Peter with a vague dread. He climbed out, hooked a prong of his anchor into a crevice of the rocks, and crawled up beside her. She watched him come, with her yellow grin making a gash between her hooked nose and chin.

"Ye're a smart one, *you* are!" she cried.

He glared down at her malignantly. The fever of his passion and grief seemed to have burned his skin until it hung like withered parchment on his high cheek bones. His bloodshot eyes moved restlessly, as if they could no longer focus on a given point.

"Ye're a smart one, *you* are!" she repeated. "Leastwise, ye may think ye are—"

"What do you want? What are you cacklin' about?" he demanded.

She laughed.

"Mebbe ye think ye got yer girl all fine an' married off to a rich feller! Mebbe ye *think* so!"

Peter's fists knotted.

"Well, and what of it?"

"What of it?" she echoed. "Ye should 'a' listened to me. Didn't I tell ye I knew them kind? Didn't I tell ye—"

"Never mind what you told me! Say what you got to say, er I'll chuck you over them rocks fer the fish! Speak out!"

She stepped back from him, balancing herself precariously on the ragged stones, and thrust her hand into the bosom of her dress.

"I don't have to speak!" she gloated. "Here—read this!"

He took the envelope, held it at arm's length, and studied out the words. She watched his face, prepared either to run or to stay and gloat, as his expression dictated; but his eyes clung to the envelope, dazed at first, then with a vague expression of astonishment.

"Read inside, too!" she suggested. "Read inside!"

Obediently he took out the folded sheet of paper and perused the invitation with sedulous care. Then his eyes sought hers—dim, puzzled. She laughed triumphantly.

"Married!" she shrieked. "He's married—been married fer years! Read the date on the top, an' ye'll see! A lot of good a wedding 'll do *him*, even if it was a minister done it!"

"Married!" he echoed.

"Her name's Della," Rose Ruby informed him, and smacked her lips with relish over this succulent detail. "Her name's Della. Mebbe he got tired of her, er mebbe he's got a harem, like them Turks ye read about. I've heard tell New York ain't much better'n Turkey nowadays!"

Peter had stood quite still as she talked, his face expressionless, his eyes fixed before him. Now he slipped the letter into his pocket, brushed past her, and started picking his way across the stones toward the shore. She followed him, warmed by the afterglow of her exultation, too much engrossed in her delectable introspections to wonder at his lack of emotion.



He trudged steadily up the road and across the lawn to the arbored back porch. Here he climbed out of his high boots and padded to the sink. Rose Ruby's eyes followed him, vaguely troubled, vaguely disappointed at his unresponsiveness—like an actress whose best speech has fallen flat. He seemed unaware of her presence as he lathered his hands and face with soap, rinsed them, and dried them on the roller towel. With meticulous care he parted and brushed his thin hair. Then he started for the hall, and turned to her at the door.

"Make me a cup of tea," he commanded, and disappeared up the stairs.

Nonplused, she hurried to the stove, touched a match to the fire that she had laid earlier that morning, filled the tea-kettle, and put it on to boil. There was something disquieting in the way Peter had accepted her momentous news—something that made her faintly self-reproachful. For the first time her thoughts went out to the girl whose tragic secret she had unearthed. She wondered what the old man would do about it.

She was setting a place at the table when he came down, dressed in the baggy gray suit that he kept for his New London trips, carrying the soft hat that was part of this significant costume. She gulped back her

curiosity, silenced by the strange look in his eyes, and said meekly:

"I'll bring yer tea. Do ye want some bread an' butter?"

He shook his head. Going to the mantel, he took down the shiny Colt, examined it carefully, and slipped it into his hip pocket.

"I don't want nothin' but a cup of tea," he told Rose Ruby, and picked up the cup she had filled.

He stood while he drank. She gazed at him fearfully, her apprehension feeding itself on the unbroken silence. When he picked up his hat and started toward the door, she took a step after him.

"Where ye goin', Pete Stayton?" Her voice cracked on a rising note of terror. "Where ye goin'?"

He looked back at her fretfully.

"Never you mind where I'm goin'! You stay here and look out fer things—hear?"

He was gone.

She hurried to the door and watched him swinging down the road toward the town, his steps long and sure, his face set resolutely before him.

Upstairs, in the tower room, Dorcas turned in her sleep and buried her head more comfortably in the pillow, while an iridescent dragon fly sunned its wings on the window sill above her head.

*(To be concluded in the July number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)*

### NO TIME TO PART

WHEN all the birds are mating,  
And all the flowers are springing,  
After the winter's waiting,  
Ah, canst thou leave me, love?  
Take from my life thy singing,  
Take from my days thy mirth,  
Thy lovely laughter flinging  
Like birds in happy winging  
High up above the earth;  
Thy body, love, the soul of thee,  
The blessed, blessed, whole of thee,  
Thy brains of musk, thy breasts of bloom,  
And leave me but an empty room,  
And the ashes of despair?

Oh, canst thou in thy heart, love,  
Find folly to be wise,  
And tear our breasts apart, love,  
And shut away thine eyes,  
Loose all the bonds that bind me,  
That I shall never find me  
Again in Paradise,  
And the garden of thine hair?

*Richard Leigh*

# The Cheek to Cheek Driver

AND HIS ENCOUNTER WITH A GIRL WHO HAD A PRETTY  
GOOD LINE HERSELF

By Mary Carolyn Davies

SHE looked with fresh eyes at the world, and found a thrill in everything—that was Eris; and because her pulses leaped so at each new sight, every one's pulses leaped at sight of her.

Eris at the wheel of her long new car, Eris in khaki knickers and red coat, with her brown mop of bobbed hair and tilted red tam, Eris with her eyes fairly leaping out at one, and her lips parted as if she were seeing visions—Eris was a sight to catch the eye of even a Pacific beach town in spring, where pretty girls in knickers and bobbed hair are too common to draw the attention of either early vacationists or residents. As Eris drove slowly up the plank walk, not only the loggers, but even the tourists, looked at her with approval.

She was New York transplanted to Rock-away, Oregon. Her eyes were as wise as New York, but her mouth was as new and fresh as the West.

As she passed the post office, a gay-colored group came tumbling out. With orange and blue sweaters, and kerchiefs on their heads, the girls looked like something that an impressionist painter had dashed off in his gayest mood. Two of them flung themselves upon her car as she slowed down.

"Hey, Eris!"

"Thought you were never coming!"

"Why so late?" the two shouted at her.

Eris's jade pump pressed the brake.

"There was a ship," she explained dreamily.

"Ship? Not here!"

The beach was too tumultuous for boats.

"Horizon—I waited—had to watch it tip over."

"There always is a boat, or a sunset, or something, for the kid to dream about, when she's got a date," briskly complained Berenice.

"Well, there's so much here to look at—ocean, mountains, periwinkles—ferns as high as three men—logging camps, and ships at sea!" She waved one helpless hand at Neah-Kah-Nie Mountains, and another at Twin Rocks. "Isn't it gorgeous?"

"It's the loveliest place in the world," said Berenice, suddenly sobered.

She climbed over the door to the seat beside Eris, while her companion tumbled into the back.

"We've got to shove!" cried Honey Danvers, tying her purple kerchief tighter on her yellow curls.

"You picked that up from a logger," accused Berenice, over her shoulder, as the car moved off.

"Did," confessed Honey promptly. "One I danced with last night at the pavilion. He wore logger's pants, too—those funny overalls rolled up at the ankles. These boys here—aren't they wonderful?"

"Brawny, I'll say," contributed Berenice briskly. "They all look like illustrations in a boxing manual. Rather different from the city—eh, Eris?"

"Yes," said Eris, twisting her car through the traffic, heavy for this before-season period; "but I can't imagine liking one of them."

"Oh, I don't know," Honey caught her up. "It would surely give you a thrill!"

"I wonder!" said Eris.

"We pick up my sister somewhere around here. She'll be at the station watching the train come in. Shows she's a native!" laughed Berenice. "I'm glad she shared her beach with us."

"Too big a crowd. Can't find her," complained Eris, dodging fat ladies in bath robes trailing home from the beach.

"There she is! Jump in, Toots! Well, what about the skating party?"

"I've asked the town," said Toots. "So many don't skate. Even my own fiancé doesn't. But he'll come." The others laughed. A pause. "If we could only get Curly!"

Her tone was worshipful, but hopeless.

"Can't you?"

Toots shrugged, but she was game to try. She called to a girl passing.

"Are the boys from Stone's Camp down? Is Curly with them?"

"Why, yes. I saw Red's car. There was a bunch in it, and I think Curly O'Neill was there. I couldn't see. They went racing by."

"They would!"

"Makes one want to see this Curly they all talk about," said Honey, amused.

Eris only tossed her head.

"The village knock-out," she said.

"Aren't those dahlias incredible?"

She nodded at the nearest yard. The beach towns are noted for their dahlias.

When the other three came back from the photographer's, bearing films, he was leaning over the side of the car, talking to Toots. Eris's heart missed a beat. Her breath caught. She stopped suddenly on the sidewalk. He was the handsomest thing she had ever seen.

"Eris, this is Curly."

His laughing eyes turned from Toots to her.

"Oh!" She shook hands. "Toots says you're the best skater in town. You must come to our skating party!"

Her quick aliveness dazed him.

"Can't you?" asked Toots humbly.

"Why—why, I guess I can. I've got a date, but—"

He hardly knew what he was saying. He could only look at Eris, and look and look again.

She knew that Toots was mad about him, and would throw over the man she was engaged to, any day, for Curly. She didn't wonder now.

And then, suddenly, it was the skating party, and Eris was despising him for a flirt.

"See here!" she said, turning on her skates and looking him fairly in the eyes. "You're not as nice as I thought, Curly O'Neill. Here you get Toots all excited over you, and then you put your arm around Berenice all the way here!"

"Toots isn't excited over me," he ob-

jected, missing a step and fumbling to catch the beat again.

"You know she is. How can you pretend to like every girl that way? It makes one despise you!"

He looked at Eris in surprise.

"You only think I'm despicable because it was Berenice and not you I put my arm around," he declared.

She gasped.

"Yes, that's true," she said then, and laughed until she quite lost step in the waltz they were doing, and caught her roller skate in his.

"It'll be you on the way home," he teased.

"Will not!"

But it was. She laughed all the time, and so did he, and he only put his arm lightly about her waist, barely touching her; but still there was something electric in the air about them, something breathless, expectant. The others did not notice it, but she knew, and in some way she was aware that he knew, too.

After the skating party they were all going on to the dance at the Rockaway Pavilion. That meant changing by candlelight, in the low, bumpy tents, from knickers into curls and party dresses. Suddenly Eris shrank from the fuss.

"Not going to the dance," she decided. "Don't feel like it."

"Do you want to drive?" he asked.

She did; so they dropped the others at the tents.

They drove off alone, out in the darkness, up, up, up to the mountains, past aisles of tall, moss-hung trees held in the hush of the forest. Deep down below them, over the cliff at the edge of the road, roared the sea, its clamor making a wall against the stillness of the mountain. In all this mighty wonder, they two, alone!

The car rushed up the grades as if it had in its own body all the wild energy of theirs. Curly leaned down and opened the cut-out, and, still leaning, looked up to smile a request for her permission. She nodded. They both laughed. They understood each other. It was the way they both liked to tear through the night, through life, with the cut-out wide open.

Shouting above the added noise, they told each other bits of their lives. Curly had run away from home to work in the logging camps.

"My father doesn't know where I am,"



he shouted, his lips close to her ear, as he half turned his head, still looking alertly at the road; "but my mother knows."

"Mothers are best, aren't they?"

Her voice was as soft and low as a whisper, and warm with sympathy. At her words, Curly leaned down impulsively and put his cheek against hers, as he drove. The contact startled her, thrilled her with its sweetness. Her eyes filled with tears. She was afraid to move, fearful lest he should take his cheek away; but he did not. His face was cool, his lashes brushed her face. Cheek to cheek they rode, looking straight ahead in the fir-scented darkness. The sea thundered below them. As they shot by, they caught wild glimpses of white foam against blackness.

"We're nearly at the end now," he said finally.

"That's the name of this drive, isn't it—the End of the Road?"

"It's what they call it here," he assented.

It was the well known lovers' drive of the beach towns. They both thought of it, but neither spoke the thought aloud.

Suddenly the forest closed in about them, and there was no more road. Curly stopped the car, and then, in the stillness, put out the lights.

"It's wonderful here!" said Eris, peering out below the car top, and rushing to the scenery as a safe subject.

"It's more than wonderful."

Curly's tone was hushed.

"Yes," she whispered, suddenly touched almost to tears by the beauty of the trees, of the night, of all that they had been feeling together.

Then he spoke.

"Let's never go back," he said, in a low, throaty tone that seemed to her more like a song than a speaking voice.

He turned from the wheel, and took her in his arms. She pulled away from him.

"Kiss me!" he pleaded. "Just once, and I won't bother you any more." His voice was agonized. "Just once!"

"No! No! It isn't right! You know it isn't right!"

"Isn't it what our lips are for? Then why not?" he asked turbulently.

"Kisses are only for lovers," she told him desperately, fighting off his crushing arms.

"Aren't we lovers? Who are lovers, if we're not?" he cried passionately.

Something in her echoed the cry, but she struggled firmly against the kiss.

"Oh, let me go, let me go!" His hold was tightening. She was becoming alarmed at her own will to weakness. "Curly!" She remembered his real name. "Emmet!" she whispered. "Let me go!"

He heard the real appeal in her voice, and knew this was not a conventional protest, but that she meant it. Slowly he let his arms relax, then he released her.

"We'd better go home," he said soberly.

"Yes," she replied meekly.

Everything was flat. Oh, did he care? Was it just the night? Could it be possible that they were meant to meet, that this was her man, that her whole future was decided—or could have been decided—in this evening's ride? Or was it just a flirtation?

She had done right to stop it; but it was so wonderful she almost wished she hadn't. Her thoughts were tumultuous.

Curly said nothing all the way home. She thought she had offended him past forgiveness. His eyes were stern. Was he wondering, too?

The car shot through all the loveliness of the scene without it stirring them now. His face was still stern, unrevealing. When they said good night, he started to draw her to him, then stopped, whirled, and was gone.

She left the car where the shadow of the biggest pine would protect it from the sun the next day, and stumbled into the tent. Berenice stirred sleepily on the other camp cot.

"Well, what is he like?" she demanded. "Did you get a kick out of him? Glory, he was there when they plastered on the looks! How does he make love? Get a thrill?"

"Yes—got a thrill."

Berenice was torn between drowsiness and curiosity.

"Some flirt, they say." She peered at her tent mate. Eris struggled into lurid orchid pyjamas.

"Some flirt!" she assented, as she leaned over on her camp cot and blew out the candle.

## II

EVERY evening after that Curly and Eris broke the stillness of the forests with the blare of their cut-out, as they flew by. He was teaching her to drive. The girls laughed. They knew Eris could drive with her eyes shut, better than most men with theirs staring wide open.

Curly was a good driver, and knew a lot about a car.

"Teach me," she suggested, on the second evening.

"I'll teach you everything," he said, and looked straight into her eyes.

She colored.

It was his curls that "got" her, she decided. No, it was his voice—that Southern accent saying the incredible Western things of the logging camps. It was his voice, and that slanting trick of the eyes. No, after all, it was his curls. She always came back to that. All the girls were mad about his hair.

Berenice and Honey Danvers watched the situation develop, and placed bets on how long Curly would stick. Toots was openly jealous. She'd have given the world for what Eris had, whether it was the real thing or not.

As for Eris, the girls no longer existed for her. Nothing existed but the forest, the sea, the car, and Curly, Curly, Curly! She did not know whether she was in love or not. She did not ask herself that. She did not think of it. She thought only of seeing Curly.

Every day was just a waiting for six o'clock, when the boys came down from the logging camp. For long hours there was nothing, and then, suddenly, incredibly, there was Curly! She lived solely for that moment in each day. It was the moment that he lived for, too.

Chasers in a logging camp, dangerous and exacting as their work is, have a lot of time for thinking, in between; and Curly was one of the chasers. It is a dangerous job, Eris knew. If a cable broke, it might take a man's head clean off his body. It had done so, in the camps near Rockaway, often enough. There was always fear, for a girl who loved a logger; but Eris did not love one—or at least she did not know whether this queer, pleasant, and yet unpleasant, nightmare of waiting and reward, this life of constant meetings and partings, was love or not.

The girls chaffed her about Curly.

"I think I'll take him on myself," decided Berenice, judiciously applying make-up. "He must be pretty good."

"He is good," answered Honey. "So Toots says. All the girls would give their eyeteeth to have him look at them."

Later Eris overheard another conversation between her two friends.

"Eris is sure playing up! You'd almost think she meant it," Honey began.

"Honey, do you think she does?" asked Berenice.

"I wish I knew!" said Honey.

Eris also wished she knew. She turned away. They had not seen her. She wished she knew! Was she in love? And, more important still, was Curly in love?

In the meantime the rides went on, and their hunger for each other's talk and presence grew.

"You're always taking care of me," she laughed once, as they rode.

"That's my life job—taking care of you."

He did not laugh. She, too, was serious just then. It was the first definite thing he had said, except in the delirium of kissing, when things don't count.

"You'll never be fired, but of course you can quit whenever you like," she answered, half in fun, but with her heart nearly suffocating her.

"You know when that will be, don't you?" he said tersely.

She knew! Being a girl, she knew; but, being a girl, she said:

"When?"

"Never!"

He looked straight ahead as he spoke. His tone was as terse as ever, but there was something in it like granite—something to depend on.

She snuggled closer. They rode past dahlias, in the dark, and past little homes, into the deep woods smelling of wet ferns and mosses.

"Curly," she said, her lips near his shoulder, as she lowered her face, "what if some day we should get married, and then, a long time after, should find that we'd changed and got over caring?"

"We'll never change," his sure voice came, and his steady eyes grew grave.

She thrilled to his assurance.

"You have hunches. Have you a hunch about that?"

"Yes!"

She sat back, in pure contentment and belief in life. His hair—think of a child with hair like that! A child that—

"What are you thinking of?" he asked, smiling his amused smile.

"I'll never tell you!"

But she told him. He stretched out his right arm, took her cheek in his hand, and pressed it hard against his.

"A little girl, with hair like that! I'd rather, I think. Or no, a little boy! Just that color and those waves—oh, Curly!"

## III

It was the next day that Toots and Honey brought their cross-stitch embroidery, to visit at the tent that belonged to Berenice and Eris.

"Curly O'Neill? Why, he never sticks to any girl!" Toots exclaimed. "He rushes a girl and then drops her."

Eris knew that Toots was jealous, but she felt, too, that Toots's words were true.

"Oh, does he?"

Berenice puckered her lips as she pulled the linen tightly over her embroidery hoop.

"Does he? I'll say he does!" hummed Toots, in a tune of years before. "What's more, he boasts. He tells the boys at camp. So does his chum, Eric—'Ek,' they call him. Blacky told me. He and Brick were there, and they heard Curly talk about Eris. Of course, I know you don't care, Eris. I know you're only stringing him."

"Of course," said Eris vaguely, dropping her head for a second, but lifting it again, shaking back her bob, and smiling her most dazzling smile.

Berenice and Honey did not look at their friend. They kept their eyes glued to their work. Toots alone was calm. She was telling Eris for her friend's own good, and her conscience approved her.

The talk went on about Curly O'Neill and his fickleness, and the hearts he had broken. Eris had one thought, as she tried to embroider:

"If I can only live till Toots goes home!" she thought. "If I can only live and go on smiling!"

"She never cared," thought the three.

She knew that they thought so—knew that she had put it over; but Curly was cleverer than these girls. Could she make him think so? She must!

To-night was the time when she had to save her face. Curly couldn't come down to Rockaway to-night. The men at Stone's Camp were working. They had to move the donkey. A new donkey engine had been brought, and, as Curly had explained to Eris, the railroad company insisted on the logging company getting it out of the way. Hence, night work for the men.

It would mean their first evening apart. Curly couldn't bear it. He had begged Eris to drive down to the little bridge near

the camp, where she had sometimes picked him up.

"About nine o'clock," he had said. "We'll have time for a little ride, anyway. I'll drive you up to the End of the Road, and then you can drive me back to camp."

So, that night, Eris slipped away. She was more than an hour late, for there had been company at the girls' bonfire.

"He won't wait," she kept telling herself, as she shot the car over the bumpy planks at Watseko at a speed that threatened to jar out every bolt in it. "He won't be there," she repeated like a chant. "He won't be there!"

But he was there. As she came in sight of what she called Curly's Bridge, a still figure with arms folded evolved from the darkness. She stopped the car, but left the engine running. He kissed her, took the wheel, and turned in the ticklish bridge space. Then they were off, past the fires at the Whitney mill, past the darkened houses of Garibaldi, up the bad hill on high, and then deep in their own black forest trails alone.

They did not talk much. He was savoring the joy of just being with her after the night's work. She was thinking of the words she would say.

"We'll go to the End of the Road, honey?" he asked.

"Yes."

Her throat hurt when he said "honey." That soft, melting tone—like the Southerner he was! Well, he was only a flirt. He deserved what she was going to do. She mustn't pity him.

Past the little skating rink at Bar View, past the mist-hung lake, past Rockaway itself, and now up, up the curves to the End of the Road. She began to tremble. When he stopped to turn and kiss her, at the end, she would speak.

"Drive slower," she breathed.

Instantly the car slowed, as if it had overheard her. Even so, the end came too soon. She was frightened now; but she meant to do just what she had planned. No boy should make a fool of her!

There were nineteen cars here to-night—they counted; but all the cars had their lights out and were still. Sweethearts planning their dining rooms, planning their honeymoons—new sweethearts just confessing their amazing preference for each other—Eris had a vision of them all, these young things in the other cars. They were just



like her and Curly; only Curly didn't mean it. He was pretending. He was "stringing her," as the girls said, just to get something to tell the boys at camp.

Well, she would show him that she had never fallen for him at all, that it was he who had been made a fool of, not she. Her wrath flared again. She had no pity now.

He turned to take her in his arms, as he always did, to give her a quick good night kiss before they started home. As he touched her, she laughed a strange laugh. He started. The joy in his eyes turned to surprise.

"Eris! What is it?"

"Nothing, only I'm getting bored. We might as well stop, mightn't we? It's been awfully amusing."

"What are you talking about?"

She wanted to drop it, to shut her eyes and go on as they had been; but she remembered what Toots had said:

"He rushes a girl and then drops her."

Well, the girl would do that first, this time!

"Only that it's over. I've got to stop it now. I want to play with my own crowd again. I've been cutting dates with them frightfully."

"But, Eris, I won't let you go!"

"Oh, Curly! You're good! You've got a great line!"

He stared.

"Line?"

"Surely you didn't think I was taking you seriously?" she said, and laughed that same laugh.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

His eyes were hurt, wondering, groping.

"Why, all this. You didn't think you were getting by, did you? Surely you're not so conceited as that?"

He still stared dumbly.

"But you're good!" she went on. "I'll say you're good! That slant of your eyes—you know just when to do it; and the hurt look!" She gazed at him critically. "Don't overwork it, Curl, old kid. You're wasting it on me. Save it for the next one!"

"There isn't going to be a next one," he said stiffly.

"Why, Curly! Surely you don't mean that I've cured you? We didn't count on that. Our idea was to turn the tables for once."

"Our?" he asked, in a dazed voice.

"Why, the girls. I've been waking Berenice up every night, when I got home, to tell her the latest things you've said." She knew he would never detect this lie, for he would never ask Berenice. "She and I have a bet on with Toots and Honey Danvers," Eris went on calmly. "We made it last winter, when we first heard about you, before we ever came to the beach. Honey bet that I couldn't vamp you."

"You—were only doing it for that?"

"Why, yes!"

"I don't believe it," he said flatly.

"You were good!" she repeated. "Do you remember when you said, 'We'll never change.'?" She mimicked his tender tone. "And the way you looked when you said, 'That's my life job—taking care of you!'"

He winced. How was he to know that the reason she remembered his words so well was that she had hugged them to herself as treasures? These things had been sacred, and now she was laughing at them. If she could do that, it must be true that she had never been in earnest.

Curly was staring at her in horror; then the horror was wiped out by a broadening smile. He gave a laugh as hard as hers.

"You've got a great line yourself!" He looked at her with the admiration of one expert for another. "You're a card!"

"I do my best," she assented modestly.

"You're three times better than I am," he declared, professionally generous.

She accepted this tribute graciously.

"You really believed me," she gloated.

"I never believed you. I was getting an awful kick out of it! Didn't you see me laughing sometimes?"

"Yes, but I never dreamed—" He paused. "You win!"

"Do you give me a diploma?"

"I give you a diploma."

Then he shook himself, like one determined to be a good sport. He laughed gayly as the whole thing dawned on him. They went over it, remembering how she had said soft things, only to repeat them, with his answers, to the girls.

"And I never suspected anything!" he marveled.

Then he laughed loud and long.

"This is good! I get a kick out of this!" he declared.

He gave her a frank hug, like a child commending a playmate for a good deed.

"Eris, I like you better than ever!" he announced.

Love—that was gone, she thought. No—worse still, it had never been. She felt sick. He liked her for being such a “card”—liked her as one professional flirt likes another, whose cleverness he admits. That was terrible, after—love! No—she had to keep reminding herself that there had never been love.

“But we can go around together still, now and then, anyway, can’t we?” he asked. She thought over this.

“No. It would bore me,” she announced finally. “There’d be no kick in it for me. Besides, I’ve got to spend a little time with the girls I came down to the beach with. I promised them I’d tell you the truth to-night, and decide the bet.”

He winced, and she was glad.

“Well, if I don’t see you again—”

He put out his hand. She shook it, but dropped it quickly. He didn’t care! He could take it like this!

She felt dizzy, shaken. Suddenly she could not bear this pain. She knew now that even as she said those atrocious things, she had been hoping, hoping that she was wrong, that he did really care, after all. Now, for the first time, she gave up hope. She wanted to hurt him as cruelly as he had hurt her.

“Oh, by the way!” she said. “Let me give you a tip, for next time.”

He turned, listening.

“You are so nearly perfect,” she told him; “but you have just one flaw.”

“What is it?” He was interested.

“Well, your voice is perfect—just the warm sympathy note that gets women—perfect! But when you are really serious, you know, and excited, you must remember to vary your terms a little. You always say ‘honey’—‘Good night, honey!’ ‘One kiss, honey!’ ‘Gee, honey, you’re wonderful!’ Call her ‘darling’ once in a while. It won’t sound so stereotyped.”

That turned a knife in her own heart. How she had heard that word in her memory—“honey,” in his soft Southern tones! But she flattered herself that she had got under his guard that time.

He winced, but still smiled. After all, she had not really hurt him! Well, she would, she vowed! What had been the sweetest thing between them? She would hurt him with that.

“Do you know what we’ve nicknamed you?” she asked, chuckling.

“What?”

His tone told nothing.

“The Cheek to Cheek Driver,” she said lightly.

His face went white. She turned the knife.

“Don’t you think it’s a good name? It’s quite the best thing you do, you know, that cheek to cheek driving. It would get almost any girl. It almost got me. It would have, if I hadn’t been trying something myself.”

Just before they said good night, they had a last cruel word for each other.

“You don’t trust me,” he accused her, apropos of some further remark of hers.

“I wouldn’t trust you around the corner,” she said bitterly.

“I wouldn’t trust you *to* the corner!” he accused promptly, and as bitterly.

“That’s fortunate for you,” she retorted calmly, but pulses were beating deafeningly in her throat and temples.

#### IV

THAT night Eris saw the dawn come down from the hills to the ocean, as she lay sleepless on her hard army cot, with Berenice slumbering peacefully on the other side of the tent.

The next night was Saturday night—their Saturday night! Curly and she had planned to drive in to Tillamook to the movie. Instead, Eris and Berenice and Toots and Honey loaded the car up with more of their rainbow-hued sort.

When she went to the garage in Rockaway, for gas, she passed Curly O’Neill. He was all dressed up, and he and Ek were having their shoes shined on the sidewalk by the hot dog stand. She looked straight at Curly, and did not speak, but drove on past, laughing, laughing. How hard, how achingly hard, it was to laugh! Why had she never noticed before how hard it was to laugh?

That night it was all over town that Eris had dropped Curly, that she had only been playing with him. The town laughed at him. The camp laughed harder. At last some one had given him a dose of his own medicine! No girl had ever got ahead of Curly before; but now!

Curly was proud, and it hurt him, Eris knew. She knew, too, that they had to have another talk. They were enemies now, and would always be; but things were up in the air. They must have a talk.

On Sunday afternoon she let him drive her car on the sand—a dangerous feat,

which he had promised her before. His chum Ek, and the girl with whom Ek was running, were on the back seat. The sudden speed in the sand, and the fierce, quick cold, startled Eris. Curly's white silk shirt blew out like a sail.

"Aren't you cold?" she shrieked at him.

He shook his head, the tears streaming down his face from the wind. The roaring in her ears was so great that she thought she could not endure it. She felt certain that it would break her eardrums.

"Tell me when it touches fifty!" he bent down to yell in her ear.

It might have meant death for them all, perhaps, for him to look from the tricky sand to the speedometer.

She crouched and watched.

"Forty — forty-four — forty-eight," she read off. "Fifty! It's sticking at fifty!"

As the car tore into space she yelled like a cowboy. They all shouted. Fifty miles an hour on the crowded beach, with the sand ready to swallow them, the ocean ready to snatch them, the sea wind howling at them and tearing at their hair and clothes! They could not hear each other's shouting now. The noise was too great; it was like a flood at their ears.

The gay bathers scattered in terror, then waved and shouted to them flashing by.

Young O'Neill slowed down and glanced at Eris.

"Do you like riding on the beach?" he asked casually.

"Oh!" she cried, her voice breaking.

He smiled. Ek and the other girl were talking excitedly behind them.

"It's the greatest thrill I ever had in all my life," she said after a moment.

"Is it?" he asked, his luminous brown eyes saying things. "Is it?" he asked, lower still.

She dropped her eyes.

"No," she said.

The remembered kiss was like a present, tangible contact. Their lips burned with it. The red flooded her cheeks. She moved as far away from him as the seat allowed. She could not even bear the touch of his shoulder against hers. They were still quarreling, she felt, and she didn't want to give in.

Both knew that this tension must break. They must get by themselves, must rid themselves of the others, and have it out. In the meantime, each was bitter, filled with distrust of the other.

She loved her car. Now that she had quarreled with Curly, now that he hated her, she had a suspicion—or she did have, until with a sure turn of the wheel O'Neill brought the car out of the sand and over the planks into the town. Then she breathed easily again.

"I know what you thought," he said.

"What?"

She dropped her eyes. He read her too easily; but surely he did not know this!

"That we were going to get the car purposely stuck in the sand, and then leave you to have it towed out, or that we were going to go too close, and let the ocean get it. Didn't you?"

"Yes," she admitted, whispering.

"Ek and I may be pretty bad, but we're not so low as that," he said shortly.

Then, suddenly, Curly had accomplished it. They had left the others at a beach tea room, and they were tearing through Rockaway, past Twin Rocks, leaving Bar View behind, and climbing the steep hill road to Garibaldi. Neither spoke a word. They were thinking grimly of the coming fight, beside which the quarrel of last evening would be as nothing.

Past Garibaldi, past the fires at the mill, to the road leading to Stone's Camp. There it was, the little bridge!

Curly left the main road, drove in, and backed into a space just big enough to leave a car. Ferns touched the fenders, cedars brushed the top.

"Wait here while I run up to camp for a minute," he said, and ran lightly into the forest road.

She waited dreamily. Then she started. She had noticed that the switch key was gone. He had locked the car and taken the key. What in the world? *Could* he have meant to? Yes, of course! Blind! Why had she trusted him?

That empty keyhole grew and swelled like a jinni released from a bottle. It blotted out the rest of the world. It was the world!

Eris laid her head on the back of the seat and cried like a child.

Presently he came running back along the trail.

"What's happened?" he cried, when he saw that she was sobbing.

"I thought you had left me, and the car, right at the camp road, for the boys to find and laugh at—to get even with me. You took the key!"



She pointed to the switch.

"But I left my hat and coat," he protested, bewildered.

"I saw; but I thought you just let them stay for a blind."

"I wouldn't do a thing like that," he said shortly.

"But it would have been good," she insisted. "You see that it would have been good—their coming back about midnight and finding me and the car."

"Yes—it would have been good, of course. Come on!"

"Where are we going?"

"Come on!"

He took her hand impersonally, to help her. They crossed a trestle, stooped under a barbed wire fence, and entered a hidden cañon green with all the shades of green in the world—the light green of fragile weeds, the rich green of moss, the grayish green of ferns, yellowish green tamarisk, bluish green yew, greenish black cedars.

"Oh, how lovely!" For just that second she ceased to hate. She stood still, her hand in his, forgetting. "What is the name of this place?"

"Electric Creek," he said. "This is the way we come down from work at night. It's prettier farther up."

It was hard going—through water, over logs, under brambles. He had to help her. Finally the creek crossed the path, and they must either stop or wade; but just beyond, across the torrent, rose a little ledge carpeted with moss and fern, an ideal resting place for lovers, a retreat out of Paradise itself.

He crouched to spring. With a leap, he landed on a rock fairly in the middle of the stream. His lithe, graceful body! The beauty of him! He reached up for her, and lifted her across as lightly as—

"You lift me around as if I were a doll!" she protested.

"You are a doll," he said.

He held her for a long instant before he swung her up on the velvet ledge, and climbed up beside her. Then the quarrel began. Bitter words were bandied.

"You shamed me before the town," he accused.

"You talked about me!" she said hotly.

"Only in fun."

"But I didn't know that!"

"You should have known."

"I'll tell you something funny after a while," she said.

She would never see him again. Why not tell him the truth?

"What is it that is so funny?" he asked stiffly.

"Well, all that I told you last night was a lie. I made it all up, so that you would never know. It was a shield; because, you see, I—I really cared."

Her face was hidden, flaming, ashamed.

There was a silence. Then, where he lay with his face on his arms, he spoke without looking at her, without raising his curly head.

"Perhaps you weren't the only one that was fooling. Perhaps I was kidding, too," he said in the lowest voice in the world.

"Oh, I know you were!" she replied.

"I don't mean then."

His face was still hidden. She held her breath. Surely she couldn't mean—

"Perhaps I liked you, too," his still voice went on, hesitating, yet brave.

"Then why—"

"Well, I couldn't let you get ahead of me, could I? When you began to make fun of everything, and to tell me you had been stringing me, I had to play up, didn't I? I couldn't let you know that I meant it all, when you had just been stringing me, could I?"

He pleaded with her to understand; and, taught by her own feeling, she did.

Then he hid his face in his arms again. His voice came muffled.

"I meant everything that I've said since we met?"

"Oh, Curly, did you? Did you?" she cried yearningly. "So did I!"

Somehow they groped to each other through their tears, and held each other awkwardly and tightly. Finally she released herself to look into his glowing face.

"Curly, do you realize that you haven't asked me to marry you yet—not formally, I mean?"

"How do they do it? You know I've had no practice in that!"

"Why, they say, 'Will you marry me?'"

"Will you marry me?" he asked her.

There was a little of jest in his words, but more anxiety, with a certain humbleness and a certain fear.

"Yes! I will!"

Suddenly there were tears in her tone. All the laughter was gone out of her, and out of him.

He threw his arms about her in a swift flood of agony and delight. His clasp said

everything. They both understood. Up to this point there had been a flavor of jest in what they said, but now—

He tightened his arms about her. He was like a dumb man trying to shout the one word that would save his life. That embrace was a vow, a promise, an entreaty; and she heard it.

Then he loosened his arms, and they raised their heads and kissed solemnly. That was like a marriage ceremony to them, as holy, as awesome, kneeling there on the moss, in the new and bewildering possession of each other.

"You're going to be mine always!" he said, awed, hardly daring to believe it. "Mine! Gee!"

His tone was reverent. His words were

of her own generation, but she did not understand his exclamation. That was the way she prayed, too.

"Your hair, Curly!"

She reached up, with a possessiveness that she had not felt before, and put both hands on his curls. She stroked his hair, reveled in it, followed its kinky lines with a mischievous finger.

Suddenly woe overspread her face. Her hand paused, checked by a thought so horrible that it blotted out the sun. She sank in a heap in the moss beside him, and wailed.

"I've just thought of the most terrible thing in the world! Oh, what if the whole sixteen should take after me, and *all* have *straight hair*?"

## The Blue Tailored Blouse

THE STORY OF A CASE OF CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

By Helen Geneva Masters

MISS MERELL, carrying her fur coat over her arm, passed through the suit section, where a stock girl was busily hanging up the garments just shown to a customer.

"I didn't know Margery worked here," thought Miss Merell, observing the quiet figure going in and out of the tills.

"Good evening, Margery," said the woman pleasantly.

"Good evening," answered the girl, with sudden indifference.

Miss Merell had felt repulsed every time she had tried to make advances to Margery. Until a few days before, the girl had been in her English class at the high school, but the teacher had been unable to establish any friendly relation with her. All Miss Merell's kind offers to give her special help in her work she entirely ignored. When she received failure reports, she smiled contemptuously, as if she knew that the grades were determined by the personal feeling of the faculty. On the girl's last day at school Miss Merell had given her a warning card

in English, and the teacher had wondered whether that cynical smile was a mask to cover an inward sense of inferiority or a genuine reflection of Margery's feeling.

Hurt by the girl's unjust resentment, Miss Merell walked over to the corner where blouses were on display, and, folding her heavy coat, laid it on a show case.

"Something in coral color, I think," she suggested to the attendant salesgirl.

"For yourself?" inquired the clerk, casually appraising Miss Merell's slender, erect figure, her dark eyes, and her well poised head, made all the more striking by her prematurely gray hair.

"No—for my young sister," replied the woman. "I might look at a dark tailored waist for myself."

The salesgirl hung up before her a tempting assortment of coral-colored silk blouses, some embroidered, some beaded, and some trimmed with fine lace berthas. Then from another compartment she brought tailored waists, severe with their clusters of tiny tucks and perfect buttonholes.

Miss Merell quickly selected a dainty lace-trimmed coral, and turned to the plain-er styles. Ah, this blue was just the sort she liked! It was wonderfully well tailored, and fine without being showy. It would make an excellent waist to wear on her long trip to the East, and then it would do for school use as long as it would hold together.

"It would be very becoming to you," commented the salesgirl, noting her customer's evident interest.

The teacher looked at the other blouses, but returned admiringly to the blue one.

"We're having a special on these to-day," added the girl. "They were cut to fifteen dollars this morning, because the sizes are incomplete. This would be just right for you," she continued, holding it up to Miss Merell's shoulders and measuring it across the back.

Convincingly perfect, the waist lay on the show case before the still hesitant woman. Fifteen dollars, she mused! The coral one for her sister was twenty-five, and Jean must have hers.

"I like it very much," she said, smiling; "but I shall not take it."

She paid for the other blouse, and, while the clerk went forward to have it wrapped, she strolled across the aisle, to admire the Brussels and Venice lace collars displayed against purple velvet backgrounds.

Receiving her package presently, Miss Merell picked up her fur coat and walked rapidly toward the elevator. She must try to finish her packing before dinner, so that her trunk could be taken to the station and go out on the same train with her.

"Come with me to the office," said a low but distinct voice in her ear, as she stepped back in the half filled car.

She looked into the gloating eyes of a robust woman, and knew that she must be in the hands of a house detective. The best thing to do, of course, was to go quickly to the office and reduce her accuser to apologies at once. A sustaining sense of humor kept Miss Merell from becoming either indignant or angry at this absurd mistake. How amused her friends and family would be at the incident, as she would serve it to them!

they left the elevator at the mezzanine floor and entered an office marked "Adjuster." Here Miss Merell was led before a flat desk where a man was signing papers. She met his keen glance, and was surprised

by an indefinable feeling of having somehow, somewhere, known him previously.

His scant hair was brushed neatly to do duty as far as it might, and his face, somewhat broad and sternly lined, flashed no lights or shadows of expression. His age was uncertain. Ten years ago he had probably looked almost as old as now, and increasing years would only accentuate his characteristics.

"I just lamped her as she was going down the aisle to get on the elevator," said the shopwoman, by way of introduction.

"What did she take?" asked the man tersely.

"Look here, and see for yourself!" replied the detective, abruptly wheeling Miss Merell around.

Perplexed and indignant at such rough handling, Miss Merell glanced down at her side, and was amazed to see the sleeve of the blue tailored blouse dangling from the folds of her fur coat.

"You didn't get it tucked in very well, did you?" mocked the termagant, drawing out the waist and laying it on the desk.

"I have no more idea how that got in there than you have," declared Miss Merell, flushing with confusion.

"Well, I have a pretty clear notion how it got there," answered the accuser sarcastically. "Things are usually where people put them!"

"Did you see her hide the blouse in her coat?" asked the man pointedly.

"No," admitted the woman—a little reluctantly, it seemed; "but I saw her looking at it and the salesgirl measuring it across her shoulders. Just then I was called up front. When I came back, I saw her beating it for the elevator. Of course, I noticed that blue sleeve waving like a signal."

"Send up the girl who was waiting on her," directed the man, returning to his papers.

Miss Merell, trusting in her innocence, although puzzled by the evidence, quietly observed her judge. The vague impression of having known him at some previous time persisted. Could he have been a student during the years she had taught in the high school? Ah, now it flashed upon her! This man undoubtedly bore a certain likeness to Morris Foley, the boy whom the teachers had dubbed "Father Time," and who had been sent away from the school fifteen years ago.



Of course, this man could not be the unfortunate Morris. Such chance resemblances were not rare. She sighed. Poor little Father Time!

"Did you show this woman blouses a short time ago?" asked the adjuster, as the detective returned with the salesgirl.

"Yes," replied the clerk. "She bought a coral-colored silk at twenty-five dollars, and paid for it. She looked at tailored blouses, and seemed to like that blue one there. I thought she was going to buy it, but she changed her mind all at once. When I looked for it to put it away, it was gone."

"If you will allow me," interjected Miss Merell, "I think I can clear up some of this mystery."

The man at the desk leaned back and gave her his attention.

"I am leaving the city this evening to spend a short vacation in the East," she explained. "I bought the coral blouse for my young sister, who is in college. I thought of buying the blue waist to wear on my journey, but I decided that I could not afford it."

The man smiled dryly.

"Doesn't that supply us with the motive for the blouse being in your possession?" he asked.

"You could not believe that I would *steal* anything—that I would be guilty of *shoplifting*!" she exclaimed, irritated at his interpretation of her words.

"A good many are guilty of that very thing," he answered.

"But I am a teacher," she protested. "I have taught here in the Fontenelle High School for fifteen years. Call up the principal. I can prove my identity right here," she added, opening her hand bag and drawing out her library card. "See there—Mary Merell, teacher, F. H. S."

"There is no line of demarcation between teachers and other humans," the adjuster replied coolly. "Similar arguments are put forward by almost every one who is brought to this office. Shoplifting is not confined to any special class of people. I could name at least one teacher who is now spending an extended leave of absence in a place designated by Judge Ross."

"But," continued Miss Merell, "I am well known here. I have innumerable friends who would certify to my character. I should be very glad to have you call any of them and ask any questions you wish.

Phone to Dr. Grant, Mr. Knox, or Judge Brennan."

"It is a good thing to have friends, especially when one is looking for a bondsman," the adjuster commented, watching the effect of his words; "but it is remarkable how influential friends fade away at such a time. Indeed, I should not be afraid to hazard that if these prominent people whom you have mentioned were faced with the evidence in this case, they would hesitate to subscribe unconditionally to your innocence."

"Why is she carrying around that fur coat, I'd like to know?" asked the shop detective insinuatingly.

"I have had the coat altered," explained Miss Merell. "I called for it in order to have it for my journey this evening."

"When did the high school teachers begin wearing fine sealskins like that?" pursued the woman insultingly.

"This coat was given me by an aunt," returned Miss Merell with dignity. "She had worn it several years herself."

"A very plausible story!" sneered the virago.

"You may return to your work," directed the adjuster, addressing the two shopwomen. "I will phone if I need either of you further."

"I can verify all that I have said," began Miss Merell, as soon as the door had closed again. "I find here a letter from my aunt, in which she mentions sending me the coat."

She laid the letter before him. He glanced at it, and then pushed it away.

"I have my own way of coming to conclusions," he said. "If I decide that a woman is guilty, either we come to a settlement in some way, or I turn her over to the police. Now the best thing we can do is to get a clear understanding of this matter. You wanted the blouse, you felt that you could not afford to buy it. In the interval in which the salesgirl went to get your package, you saw your chance to slip the waist into your coat. I do not wish to be too hard on you. I realize that this is probably your first offense. If you had been experienced, the goods would probably have been better concealed. You may be a teacher, as you say you are. If so, you will be glad to avoid the publicity that a formal arrest and trial would be certain to make for you. You may sign this paper, and we will call the matter settled."

He took a typewritten sheet from a drawer in his desk, and handed it to her.

Miss Merell, tired from long standing, and unnerved by the unquestionably compromising mesh of circumstances, grasped the desk to keep from swaying. The man brought a chair from a corner of the room.

"Sit down," he said, not unkindly.

For a moment the words on the paper danced meaninglessly before her. Then, slowly, she grasped their purport. By signing the document she would tacitly admit her guilt, but with the return of the property the matter would end. Of course, a record would be kept, so that in case of a second offense no further leniency could be expected.

He dipped a pen in the ink and pushed it toward her.

"Call the police!" she said, rising indignantly. "I will never have anything like this written against my name! I did not take the blouse, and I will stand all the publicity you want to make before I will sign any such statement!"

"Madam," said the man, in a changed tone, "would you please be seated for a few moments?"

Miss Merell, surprised at the gentleness of her inquisitor's tone, sank exhausted into the chair.

"I hope you will pardon me the inconvenience and humiliation I have caused you," he continued. "In spite of the damaging circumstantial evidence, you have established your innocence to my satisfaction. However, I should very much like to solve this mystery. And you—surely you are interested in learning how the blouse came to be in your possession?"

But the woman, grasping the fact that somehow she had cleared herself, scarcely heard his question. Through her entire examination her thoughts had returned to little Father Time, the lad whose case closely paralleled hers.

"I realize now," she said, groping for her self-possession, "just how Morris Foley felt when he was sent to the reform school."

"Morris Foley, did you say?" exclaimed the man interrogatively.

"He was a little freshman the first year I taught in Fontenelle," she explained, gradually gaining her composure. "One of the teachers accused him of stealing a pocketbook containing money, and the empty purse was found in his coat. He

declared that he was innocent, but the evidence was against him, and he was hustled off to reform school. Somehow I never thought he was guilty."

"The case against Morris Foley was weak in that it was never proved that he had had the money, and no adequate motive for theft was ever established," returned the adjuster.

"Then you knew Morris Foley? He was innocent?"

"Yes, madam—I am Morris Foley."

"I think I understand," observed the woman after a pause, "why you are here. You are detecting the innocent!"

"Thank you," answered the man, with sincerity. "Few seem to realize my point of view."

"Did you ever know," inquired Miss Merell presently, "who really committed the theft of which you were accused?"

"I knew to my own satisfaction," he replied. "It was a boy who had a grudge against the teacher because she had kept him after school a number of times. He was jealous of me because I had not been kept. He discharged all his ill will at once. I wonder if a similar motive could have caused any one to slip that blouse into your coat, to make you trouble! Did you notice any person in the store this afternoon who could have had any hard feeling toward you?"

With quick intuition Miss Merell recalled Margery's enigmatic smile when she had received her warning card in English, only a few days before. Ah, the morose little stock girl, moving so quietly in and out of the tills, could probably explain the mystery!

"But you," she said, "never brought that other boy into the case. Why didn't you put them upon his track and clear yourself?"

"I was sure in my own mind," he replied, "but I had no direct proofs of his guilt. It is a serious thing to accuse without definite evidence."

"So it is, indeed," agreed Miss Merell reflectively.

"Can't you recall any one you have seen here who might have followed you up and put that blouse into your coat while you were waiting for your package?" he asked again.

"No, Morris Foley," said Miss Merell, rising and meeting his eyes squarely. "No—there is no one whom I can accuse."

# The Twisted Foot

A STORY OF ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE IN THE GREAT WEST

By William Patterson White

Author of "The Owner of the Lazy D," "The Rider of Golden Bar," etc.

## XXXIII

"**H**E'S comin' around," Buff heard a voice say—the voice of his cousin, Bill Holliday.

He was conscious, but he did not open his eyes. It was too much trouble. He felt no pain, only a great weariness. It was delicious to lie there and rest.

"He lost a heap of blood when that bandage slipped on his arm," remarked the voice of a leading citizen, a member of the posse.

"He ain't the only one to lose blood," declared the voice of Nap Tobias. "He sure plugged that fellah when he went to top his horse. Just look at the blood on the grass here!"

The insertion of a pin in the most sensitive portion of his anatomy could not have jerked Buff out of his lethargy more quickly than did that remark of the chief deputy. He opened his eyes, rolled over, and supported himself on an elbow.

"I hit him?" he whispered to the group around him. "Nap say I hit him?"

Some one replied in the affirmative. Bill Holliday cut in with—

"Why didn't you stay put, Buff? You might have known you couldn't injun up on him."

Buff weakly shook his head.

"I didn't injun up on him. He saw me coming."

"Saw you coming!" repeated Bill. "Saw you coming, and was only able to hit you once! It—it don't sound reasonable."

Buff sat up.

"Is that a creek?" he asked quietly. "It is a creek, and I'm going to take a swim right now."

So saying, and before any one could stop

him, he struggled to his knees; but his strength was not sufficient to lift him to his feet. He suddenly pitched over on his side and lay, his cheek in the grass, muttering unintelligibly.

This second lapse into delirium lasted more than two days. Buff knew nothing of his transportation by wagon into Farewell, or of his subsequent delivery into a bed at Bill Lainey's hotel, where he was ministered to by Mrs. Lainey, a wise woman skilled in simples.

Late in the afternoon of the second day he opened his eyes and gazed sanely into the face of Bill Holliday.

"How you feeling?" Bill asked at once, reaching for a glass of dark liquid that stood on the table by the bed, and slipping a strong hand under Buff's shoulders. "Drink this when I lift you up. Yeah, drink it—Mis' Lainey's orders. It 'll put feathers on your chest, she says."

Buff gulped down the bitter stuff. Mrs. Lainey had certainly told the truth, for almost at once he began to feel new life steal back into his body.

"Yep," said Bill, in reply to his question. "Some kind of Injun stuff, I guess. Mis' Lainey, she knows all about those things. What's a matter?"

Buff was screwing up his forehead in an effort to remember something—something that had happened when he was shot—no, after he was shot—something that Nap Tobias had said. What was it? The Twisted—that was it! He had wounded the Twisted Foot.

"You folks trail the Twisted Foot after you found me?" he asked.

Bill nodded.

"We left two fellahs with you, and the rest of us lit out on the trail. We followed



his horse tracks four or five miles. At first we found blood, then we didn't, so he managed to tie up his nicks all right. You hit him hard and deep, I should say."

Bill broke off and rolled a cigarette. This was maddening.

"What happened, anyway?" demanded Buff impatiently. "You lost the trail, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes," said Bill cheerfully. "We trailed him right across the north edge of the Bar S breaks clear to Soogan Creek. Then he rode in the water, and we never did find where he came out. After that I managed to get separated from Nap, and next day I happened in at the Eighty-Eight—with a lame horse, to make it look natural. Sam, he wasn't there. I didn't ask after him, but Mame made a point of telling me he was in Piegan, and expected to be gone two or three weeks, maybe longer. According to Lonzo, he was coming back today; but Lonzo left the ranch *before* the Twisted Foot was shot. Of course, if Sam Caltrop is the Twisted Foot, it's a cinch to see the reason for the change to two or three weeks or longer. Anyway, I sent a letter by Whisky Jim to the station agent at Blossom to telegraph the sheriff at Piegan to see was Sam Caltrop in town, and to lemme know right away."

"You sure think of things!" were Buff's words of ungrudging praise.

"The only original," smirked Bill. "Well, after I did all that, I rode around by the Fair place."

"Did you see Gilian?"

"Gilian? Gilian? Did I see Gilian? Well, now, seems like I did see Gilian."

"Did she—"

A pause.

"No," denied Bill. "She didn't. She didn't ask me a thing about you."

"Not a word? Nothing?"

"No."

"Didn't she send any word, either?"

Bill shook his head.

"She didn't, and what do you care? You're well out of it, if you ask me."

"I ain't askin' you," snapped Buff.

He could hardly believe it. Not even a message! Perhaps Jack Fair had not gone to see his family yet; but there was little comfort there, because sound sense told him that Jack Fair, unless something totally unforeseen had occurred, must assuredly have seen his family, and consequently must have related what had come

to pass on the bank of Packsaddle Creek. In the face of that relation, how could Gilian persist in her unjust attitude? It was too much, especially for a man fast in his bed. The world was all against Buff. His luck was out.

If he could only stop loving her, and thus rid himself of this torture! For a moment he almost hated her. Then he saw her face as he had seen it just before she had kissed him, and he knew that no matter what she did or did not do, he could not stop loving her.

"It sure is hell!" he muttered between clenched teeth.

"He's delirious again, the poor fellah," Bill observed with alarm, and went at once in search of Mrs. Lainey.

Three days later Nap Tobias developed what he called a clew, collected another posse, and, taking Bill with him, rode south. Buff promptly began to stew, for Bill had intended to ride out to the Fair place on the very day of his departure with Nap. With Bill gone, Buff was completely cut off from obtaining news of Gilian and her family.

His imagination fired by his wound, he fretted himself into a light fever by the time the sun went down. This was not diminished, after supper, by a visit from Captain Burr. Having gone through four years of fighting for the Lost Cause, the captain was an authority on wounds, and he regaled Buff with ghastly accounts of injuries he had met.

"I remembah one gentleman, suh," the captain said in part, "who had the misfo'tune at Shiloh to be shot almost precisely as you are shot, Buff. Gangrene set in, and they had to amputate his arm. Unfo'tunately the gangrene broke out in the wound in his head. They could not amputate his head without killin' him, so they just had to let him die. Now that's what I call hard luck, suh. Ah—uh—by the way, Buff, Ah unde'stand the prisonehs escaped from jail."

"They did."

"Ah can account fo' three of them—Pipeh, Kergow, and George Bushong."

"Huh!"

"Ah met 'em—they met me, ratheh—about fifteen miles west of Riley's Ranch early in the mawnin'. They held me up, took mah poke, and ate mah breakfast. Afteh breakfast they demanded what Ah'd

been hopin' they'd demand—whisky. Now evveh since Ah've been in the peddlin' business Ah've expected to be held up some time, and Ah've been prepared. Ah always have with me a quart bottle docteh'd with knockout drops. Suh, no results could have been happieh. They all drank heartily. They all became unconscious. Ah bound them hand and foot with mah spare breechin' straps, loaded 'em on the wagon, and packed 'em to Riley's, wheah, with Riley's help, Ah hung 'em. Yo' needn't look so horrified, Buff. Eve'ything was perfectly regulah. Riley and his punchehs heard mah evidence befo' anything was done. It was a long way to the nearest sheriff and a short way to a rope. Besides, you remembah how Joe cheated us out of hangin' Tresawna that time? So theah you ah, suh! These three men were escaped prisonehs, and road agents to boot. Ah've always held such will stand hangin'; and Riley's outfit thought so too."

Buff forebore to quibble over what was, after all, a mere technicality, but he did wish the captain hadn't been so hasty. He would have liked to question those three prisoners. They knew who released them, and one of them, at least, might have been prevailed upon to talk. Now it was too late. Unless the captain—

"I don't suppose you asked 'em how they got out of jail, cap'n?"

"Why, no, Buff, Ah didn't. Ah never thought of it. Was it necessa'y?"

"Oh, no. They say anything about Chavez and Tresawna?"

The captain shook his head.

"They did not. Ah'm afraid those two got clear away. How about a little drink, Buff? Ah brought some good stuff along in case—"

He reached toward a hip pocket, but Mrs. Lainey, entering at the moment, heard the latter part of his discourse, and, greatly incensed at this breach of sick room etiquette, drove him out forthwith. Slamming the door upon his protestations, she returned to the bedside and laid a hand upon the patient's head.

"The idea!" she fumed. "Offering you a drink, and getting you stirred up with his fool talk! Your head's just as hot as it can be. I'll have to give you a potion."

Which, ten minutes later, she did.

"Ugh!" grunted Buff, removing the glass from his lips after a preliminary swallow. "You trying to poison me, Mis' Lainey?

There's calomel in this stuff. I can't take calomel. It makes me sick."

"Shut up!" exclaimed Mrs. Lainey, indignant at such captiousness. "What does a lazy, good-for-nothing, Johnny-fall-off-his-horse deputy know about drugs? There ain't calomel in this medicine. If there was, you'd swallow it, just like you're going to swallow the rest of this. Gulp it down, now! You want I should call Bill Lainey in here to set on you while I hold your nose? All right! Oh, Bill! Come up here a shake!"

"Nemmine calling Bill," Buff said hastily, and drank off his draft without more ado.

"There!" smiled Mrs. Lainey, taking the empty tumbler and smoothing the bedclothes. "You go right to sleep, and tomorrow morning, when you wake up, you'll feel a lot better."

She spoke truly, for Buff awoke refreshed and stronger, and ate his breakfast sitting up. When Mrs. Lainey had taken the breakfast things back to the kitchen, the open window lured him with a wide expanse of blue sky and a far view of sun-drenched hills.

With care and caution he slipped his legs over the side of the bed, sat up, and rested the soles of his bare feet on the narrow strip of carpet on the floor. He could tell by the tingling in his calves and ankles that his leg muscles were considerably below par.

Resting a hand against the wall for support, he shuffled his way to the window and sank down on a chair in front of it. He rested his elbow on the warm sill, leaned out, and inhaled deeply. It was good to breathe the outer air and see the outer world!

A summer south wind was blowing in warm gusts and raising dust devils among the corrals. In the inclosures, horses dozed on three legs, or lipped each other drowsily. Around the corner of a house some one was splitting kindling wood. Strung on a line behind the Starlight Saloon, Mrs. Fernie's wash was whipping itself dry. He noticed that a handkerchief had flirted a corner loose from its clamping clothespin, and fluttered out straight, held by the other clothespin only. While his idle gaze was still on the handkerchief, it broke loose from the single clothespin, shot up into the air, then dropped almost to the ground, but was caught by a dust devil and flung aloft in a

ball that shook itself out and settled slowly to the earth, almost beneath Buff's window.

As one with time on his hands will almost invariably act toward anything that moves, Buff had been watching the gyrations of the handkerchief. After it had fallen to earth, his eyes drifted elsewhere, but the sight of the handkerchief had cut into a hitherto blind lode in his subconscious mind. His eyes came back—came back and rested. He leaned as far out and down as he could. It may be said that he stared; for the handkerchief was not of the ordinary small size affected by woman. It was large enough to be worn around a person's neck, and three blue stripes adorned its border.

"Land sakes!" exclaimed the voice of Mrs. Lainey. "What you doing out of bed, I'd like to know? You march right back this instant!"

Buff marched as requested, and slipped under the covers, closely observed by Mrs. Lainey.

"You're acting a mite stronger already," said she, and pursed her lips doubtfully.

"I feel stronger," declared Buff, for what he had seen under the window had put new life in him.

Mrs. Lainey scratched her chin and shook her head.

"All the same, you've got to stay in bed till you're sure-enough cured. You've lost a heap of blood, and this sudden strength of yours is only a flash in the pan. Now, that 'll do. I know what I'm talking about."

But Buff was inspired to give the lady an argument.

"I got to get out of here," he urged.

"Not under a week."

"I've got to get up!"

"You ain't, so that's settled."

He shook his now throbbing head ever so slightly.

"I've got to. You don't understand, but I've got to. I—I've got some important business to attend to."

"No business is so important as your getting well."

"I said you didn't understand!"

"So that's it!" said Mrs. Lainey, after a pregnant moment. "I didn't think there was anything in what I heard, seeing that she didn't come to see you."

"I expect she was busy, ma'am," declared Buff loyally.

"Well, I was young once myself," sniffed

Mrs. Lainey, "and I know I wouldn't be too busy—if I *wanted* to come. Men always want the apple they can't reach. The apple that falls on them they've got no use for at all." She nodded her head at him in a secretive manner. "Oh, I ain't telling all I know!"

"That's right, ma'am," said he, humoring her, and devoutly hoping that she would go away and leave him alone. "I wouldn't, either."

Which, of course, had the effect of making her tell all she knew.

"Yeah, if that girl from the Lazy didn't come in to see you or ask after you, another lady did."

"Who asked after me?"

"Lil Fernie."

Buff could only stare his amazement. Mrs. Lainey nodded emphatically.

"Yeah, Mr. Man. Couple of hours after you were brought in, Lil was surely asking after you a plenty. Wanted to know where you were, and how bad you were hit, and what I was doing for you. She even asked the names of the yarbs I'm using to heal the wounds, and what I'm making the infusions from, too. She spent mighty nigh a hour in my kitchen. She'd have come up to see you, only, after that little trouble in her saloon, she thought maybe she'd better not. Shucks, Buff, she ain't the kind to bear malice, and you ought not to be. Got a nice business, too. Fernie left her well fixed."

Buff hardly heard the lady's ramblings. He was too busy absorbing the significance of Lil Fernie's sudden desire for knowledge in the remedial treatment of gunshot wounds.

When Mrs. Lainey had run down, he had the grace to nod, quite as if he had been listening with interest to every word she said.

"I'd like to see Lil, sort of," he remarked, in as wistful a tone as he could manage.

Mrs. Lainey fell splash into the trap.

"I'll go over and get her."

When she returned, her face was as long as the proverbial pony's.

"I'm sure sorry," she informed him, "but Lil ain't home. She's gone visiting Mis' Shaner at the Three Bars."

Buff had been expecting something like this. His grieved expression would have been a credit to almost any actor.

"Know when she went away?"



"Day before yesterday. The barkeep said she started along about sundown. He wanted her to wait till daylight, but she said it was cooler riding at night. Want I should get you anything? No? Well, holler if you do. Huh? No, you can't go out-doors to-morrow. Just to make sure you don't, I'll take your clothes downstairs with me. I ain't lettin' you cold deck me no-how—so there!"

Buff well-nigh worked himself into a fever and a consequent relapse before Bill's return the following day. It may as well be mentioned in passing that Nap's clew had turned out a sad bloomer. With the door closed and Bill sitting at his bedside, Buff told what he had learned.

"It's a cinch she didn't go to the Three Bars," he said in conclusion; "but you might as well ride over there yourself and make sure."

"I'll go right after dinner," said Bill. "I'd sure like to know how bad he's hurt. Maybe he's going to kick off," he added hopefully.

"No such luck! We'll have to play the hand out. Hear what happened to Piper, Mac, and Bushong down at Riley's? No? Roll me a smoke and I'll tell you."

When Bill returned the next morning, a harsh expression underlay the dust on his face.

"Lil Fernie hasn't been to the Three Bars for three months," he informed Buff; "so that's that. She ain't home, either. Maybe she's gone for good."

Buff shook his head in negation.

"No reason why she should, yet. She doesn't know what we know."

"What we're guessing, you mean. You think she's the No. 2 in those notes?"

"I just can't tell. Bill, I'm stuck here. You've got to find out where Lil went. On your way out, ask Mis' Lainey to come up here."

Mrs. Lainey appeared, wiping her hands on her apron. She smiled upon Buff brightly.

"Mis' Lainey," he said, "I've got to get out of here."

The bright smile changed to one of wearied boredom.

"You've said that before."

"I mean it now—no fooling. Shucks, Mis' Lainey, a lady like you, knowing all you know about Injun herbs and such, ought to be able to fix me up prompt and

soon. It ain't like I was seriously sick or something."

"Oh, ain't it? A lot you know! You're raving, Buff. That girl will keep, and she don't like you, anyway."

"Listen, Mis' Lainey, don't think I don't appreciate all you're doing for me. I do. I know you're doing what's best for me, too; but I'm needed away from here. It ain't what you think at all. It's life or death, maybe, for somebody. If you can't help me out, all right; but sick or well, clothes or no clothes, I'm going out of here to-morrow night!"

She surveyed him perplexedly. It was evident that his earnestness impressed her.

"I guess you mean it," she said slowly. "Life or death, huh? But to-morrow night is rank foolishness. No, wait a shake, before you fly off the handle! Give me until day after to-morrow at noon, and in the meantime, if you're willing to take a glassful every hour, except while you're sleeping, of the worst-tasting stuff you ever drank in your life, I'll bring your clothes back and let you go. Mind, now, I'm going dead against my principles. I believe in letting nature take its course and do the work whenever possible; but you said life or death for somebody, maybe—"

He nodded gravely.

"I'm telling you straight."

"It may mean your own life before we're through," she hesitated. "It's a big responsibility for me. I—"

"You can't back out now!" he exclaimed. "You promised."

"Oh, I'll do it," she said crossly. "I always was a born fool!"

### XXXIV

On the following morning Buff felt like a new man. So fully recovered was he, in his own estimation, that he endeavored to prevail upon Mrs. Lainey to permit him to anticipate his departure by twenty-four hours; but to this rearrangement Mrs. Lainey would not consent.

"I'm going to stick to my side of the bargain," she declared succinctly. "You stick to yours!"

In the afternoon Buff was sitting at his window, looking out. A distant rider coming in from the east attracted his attention. At first, before he could distinguish the color of the horse, he thought it must be Bill; but as the rider drew nearer, the horse proved to be a red roan.

"A woman's riding that horse," he muttered, when the roan was still half a mile away.

He moved his chair back from the window, so that he could see and not be seen. When the woman rider halved the half mile, he saw that it was Lil Fernie. He at once pushed his chair as far as possible to the left of the window, so that he could bring under observation the whole of the Starlight corral.

The roan brought his mistress to the corral gate and stopped. He had been ridden hard and long. The hair of his hide stood out in matted points where sweat and dirt had caked and stiffened. He had fallen, too—witness the dried mud on his near flank and hip, on the stirrup and stirrup leather and fender; and yet, oddly enough, there was no mud on Lil's boots or skirt.

"He was down in red mud," Buff said to himself.

He searched the pigeonholes of his memory for reference to a place where there was red mud. He could not recall any such place at the moment.

In his absorbed interest he leaned forward farther than he had intended. Lil, who had led her mount into the corral, looked up at his window and saw him, as she turned to strip off her saddle. He did not draw back. Such a move would have been too obvious. He remained where he was, looking out, a mere spectator taking a casual view of things in general. He breathed a prayer that Mrs. Fernie would assume this view.

After this single glance she did not look at him again, though he continued to view the Starlight corral. When Lil's roan turned toward the trough, Buff saw that the animal's off side was as thoroughly caked with mud as was the near.

Bill had not returned from his quest by the time Buff drank his last nauseating draft of the day and blew out the lamp. Buff did not immediately go to sleep. When he finally succumbed, his slumber was light, hardly more than a respectable doze. Otherwise his ears might not have been attuned to hear, midway between the hours of two and three in the morning, a slight sound beneath his window.

Buff sat up in bed. He had his wits about him, and he moved so carefully that not a spring creaked. It speaks well for his preparedness that when he sat up, his six-shooter sat up with him. Holding back

the trigger, so that the cocking operation would make no sound, he thumbed the hammer down.

As quietly as the well known cat stalks the marauding mouse, Buff got himself out of bed and to the gray rectangle that was the window. For a moment he listened, as a sudden scraping noise smote his eardrums—a sound that ceased as suddenly as it began.

He moved to the side of the window and leaned sidewise against the casing, his body tense, his weight on the balls of his bare feet. He felt no bodily weakness now. He was again his hardy, muscular self—or so it seemed to him.

He speculated on the identity of the maker of these stealthy sounds. Lil Fernie? He didn't think so. Stony Flint? Hardly, for the gambler's hand was still crippled. Had either or both of that precious pair, Tresawna and Chavez, returned to town? Possibly, but the odds were against it.

So Buff waited, and, waiting, saw the top of a ladder appear above the window sill. By the iron crossbolt set below the top rung, he recognized the ladder as an old acquaintance. It was the property of Piney Jackson, the local blacksmith. It was impossible that Piney should be conspiring against him. He and Piney had always been the best of friends.

He flattened himself against the wall and craned his neck, so that he could peer out without being seen.

The ladder shook a little. Some one had placed a foot on the first rung. Buff could see the top of a wide hat. He also saw the dim gleam of a weapon in the man's right hand. Buff raised his six-shooter.

Then what was on the verge of becoming a tragedy became on the instant the broadest of farces. A black and white streak shot around the corner of the hotel, and, giving vent to a hurricane of growls, flung itself briskly upon the citizen mounting the ladder. With a dismayed oath the climber jerked his body backward. He, the black and white streak—which turned out to be Piney Jackson's dog—and the ladder, fell to earth in a furious tangle. Oaths, snarls, and the crackling of snapped rungs affronted the kindly night.

Buff, leaning outward, could have shot into the heaving mass below and run a fair chance of perforating the primary disturber of his rest; but he did not care to assume the risk of killing Piney's dog, for that ani-

mal was the apple of both the blacksmith's eyes. Then, too, the midnight ladderman had not committed any overt act. So far Buff had, logically speaking, nothing against him save loss of sleep.

This being the case, Buff decided to proceed to the center of excitement and force the issue, if he could—with which laudable end in view he raced for the door, tore it open, and hurled himself along the passage to the stairs.

It had not occurred to him that the roar of battle without would naturally have roused the house, but so it had. He reached the head of the stairs in company with Bill Lainey and a drummer. None of the three could check his rush. Still in company, they went downstairs. Half a dozen balusters made the trip with them.

Somehow Buff contrived to ride the storm. He stepped on nothing except the fairly yielding bodies of Bill Lainey and the drummer until he hurdled a packsaddle, complete with breeching and lash rope, which somebody had carelessly left at the foot of the stairs, and stubbed his toes, his stomach, and his face against the wall of the office. The collision knocked the breath out of him for a moment, but did not break his hold on his six-shooter.

Leaving Bill Lainey, the six balusters, the drummer, and the packsaddle to unravel themselves as best they could, Buff, guided by the feeble rays of the office night lamp, fled, crowing and gasping, toward the kitchen. He staggered through the kitchen, managed to bark his shins severely on the apron of the stove, and jerked open the kitchen door.

Observing appropriate caution, he looked out. He saw the ladder lying on the ground, and Piney's large black and white dog worrying a piece of cloth. Of the ladderman there was no other sign. The dog might have eaten him, so thoroughly absent was he.

Buff, his lungs wheezing like broken bellows, his shins a blinding ache, limped to the box wherein Mrs. Lainey kept the daily meat.

Two minutes later the dog had a pork chop and Buff had the piece of cloth.

Feeling sure that the ladderman was either local talent or in touch with it, Buff decided to maintain an entire lack of knowledge that entry to his room had been attempted. Accordingly he returned to the

office. The drummer was sitting on a chair, rubbing himself. Bill Lainey was hurling the packsaddle and its equipment into the street, and swearing at the fool who had left it at the foot of the stairs.

"If whoever owns that packsaddle don't like it, he can lump it!" concluded Lainey.

He slammed the front door and for the first time perceived his wife's patient. "So you're the jigger threw me and this other sport downstairs, hey? I thought you were sickly."

"I am."

"You ain't," Lainey contradicted, with feeling. "Any feller who can kick as hard with his bare heels as you kicked me ain't sick—not by a jugful! What was that fracas out back? I don't hear any noise now."

"It's all over," said Buff. "Some drunk tripped over a ladder and got mixed up with Piney Jackson's dog."

"Who was it?"

"Damfino. He was gone when I got there."

Lainey swore, and tenderly fingered a loose tooth.

"And that's what I got half the teeth in my head shook loose for! From the racket, I thought somebody was trying to bust in the house."

"Guess the ladder must have hit the wall, maybe," smoothly explained Buff. "They sure were mighty active."

"I hope the dog chewed his leg off!" was Lainey's vindictive comment, as he glanced at the office clock. "Waking everybody up at three in the morning!"

When Mrs. Lainey brought breakfast to Buff, she decided that since he was apparently suffering no ill effects from the alarums and excursions of the night—he concealed from her the fact of his bruised shins—he could have his clothes and walk around the house and as far as the corral, if he'd a mind to; but he must keep on with his medicine till noon, as first agreed, or she'd attend to him.

Buff, the affair of the ladderman having made it necessary for him to get in touch with Bill as soon as possible, dressed with more than his customary care—that is, he tucked an extra six-shooter under the waistband of his trousers, pulled his vest down over the butt, dropped his derringer into a vest pocket, and tied down the holster of the six-shooter he wore in plain view on his right leg.



All of which being done to his satisfaction, he went outside and sat down on the wash bench that stood beside the kitchen door. From here he could keep an eye on the hotel corral, the obvious place to meet his cousin.

He had not been sitting on the bench for ten minutes when Lil Fernie emerged from her back door and came toward him. Buff stiffened where he sat. Walking up to him, she greeted him with a wistful smile and a soft-spoken—

"Good morning!"

To say that Buff was astonished is putting it mildly. He was dumfounded. For an appreciable minute he could only stare. Finally he got to his feet and achieved a passable salutation.

Lil Fernie glanced toward the kitchen, where the sound of the scouring of a frying pan had ceased abruptly, and jerked her head backward in the direction of the corral.

"Let's take a little walk," was her first suggestion.

"What for?" Buff queried bluntly.

"I want to talk to you."

He considered, watching her closely, taking stock. The smile upon her lips was inviting, attractive. Her gray-green eyes were no longer blank and ophidian. Although they did not exhibit the melting artlessness so much desired by the simple-minded flapper, it may be said that they at least beamed.

Again Lil glanced toward the kitchen.

"I don't want to talk to you here," she whispered.

He nodded.

"Let's go!"

They strolled toward the corral. Farewell did nothing so coarse as fill its back doorways. It pulled the kitchen curtains slightly to one side, and commented out of the corner of its collective mouth. Buff, as one will who feels the eyes of many boring into his back, turned his head.

"Everybody's looking," he said with a chuckle—for it was just as well to start on a careless note.

Lil tossed her head.

"What do we care?"

"That's so," he assented. "How far are you taking me?"

"Don't you like to walk with me?" she asked in a hurt tone.

"Oh, sure! But I'm a sick man. I ain't as young as I was, either. Fellah as

decrepit as I am has got to look after his good health."

"There's a nice log out back of my corral."

"There's a nice wagon body lying right in front of this one. If I put this board across the sides—so—we can sit down all salubrious. Besides, I want to stay where I can see Bill come in."

The gray-green eyes, narrowing at this, lost some of their ingenuousness.

"Bill?" their owner inquired.

"Bill—my cousin. Fine fellah, but careless, very careless, especially where money is concerned. He owes me fourteen dollars, and I want to strike him as soon as he gets off his horse, so's he won't have a chance to run off and blow his pocketful—see?"

"I see," said she indifferently, and sank down on the seat Buff had provided.

At this juncture a horse and rider came round the corner of the corral. Buff looked up and saw, not his relative, but Rainbow. He waved to her, calling a greeting. She responded politely, if distantly. He knew that she must be wondering greatly to see him sitting there in seemingly complete amity with Lil Fernie.

"Good horse the Rainbow's got," he remarked chattily, as the half-breed girl rode past the corner of the hotel on her way to the street.

"Yes," said Lil Fernie.

Buff rolled a cigarette in silence. He seemed not to be aware of his companion; but he sensed that she was watching him out of the corners of her eyes, and continually fiddling with her fingers. She was nervous. Her next move showed as much.

"I—I suppose you think I'm awfully bold to come to you this way," she said hesitatingly.

He regarded her dispassionately.

"I suppose you must want something, or you wouldn't come to me."

She caught her breath and vehemently denied the insinuation.

"I just wanted to talk to you—that's all," she declared.

"The snake!" he thought to himself.

"If I don't fill my hand out of this, I'm no good." Aloud he said: "Talk, then. I ain't caring."

"You're not very polite!"

Oh, the running sob in her voice! The unshed tears in her deceitful eyes!

"I haven't forgotten the last time we met," he told her bluntly.

She looked at him heartbrokenly.

"I was hoping you—you would."

"Oh, I ain't holding it against you."

"That's just it! You don't care. You're utterly indifferent to me, and—and my heart is breaking!"

"Is it?"

"Yes! Oh, Buff, I was mad, mad to do what I did to you; but I was half crazy with jealousy. I wanted you then. I want you now. I'd have been a good wife to you."

She looked squarely at him. He returned her gaze, and marveled at her acting. He played up like a major by saying:

"I expect you would, Lil."

Lil waited a moment, and then, as he did not continue, she said:

"We were always mighty good friends until Gilian Fair came along."

"Leave her out of it," was his sharp command.

"All right, Buff," she assented humbly.

"I know I haven't any chance with you now. Did you hear that awful racket out here last night?"

"Hear it? I should say I did. I'd like nothing better than to get my paws on that drunken sot. Waking folks out of a sound sleep like that!"

"He woke me up, too. That's an awful thing about the sheriff, isn't it?"

This was what he was waiting for.

"I expect he must have made Yandle almighty mad; but we've got Yandle in jail, so that's all right."

"He may escape, as the others did."

"He won't. Didn't you know Nap swore in two deputies to guard him turn about?"

"I hadn't heard that." She paused. He waited. Finally she said, as if the idea had that moment occurred to her: "Lot of crime going on now. Look at poor Jack Cobway!"

"Yeah." He did not trust himself to look at her. "Poor Jack Cobway!"

The double-faced, lying hypocrite! He believed that in a moment he would be able to clinch the nails of his suspicions.

"Sure looks like nothing could stop the Twisted Foot," said she. "That is, if it's true what I heard, about the cigarette butts and the lost track."

"You heard correct. He's one clever bandit, that fellah. Unless we find a fresh clew, we'll have to drop this Cobway murder."

"Yes? How badly do you think you wounded him?"

Now was the time!

"I didn't hit him. Who said I did?"

Lil's surprise was unfeigned.

"Why, Buff, Nap, all of 'em, were saying they found blood, and you must have wounded him."

He smiled in tolerant scorn.

"Is that what they're saying?" he commented. "First I knew of it. Funny how things like that get around! I was out of my head when they located me, and I suppose I must have given 'em the wrong notion about the blood they found. It wasn't his blood—it was his horse's. A bright bay he was, I remember."

"But you were delirious. How can you be sure you wounded the horse and not the man?"

"I wasn't delirious then. No, I know I hit the horse all right. Not bad, though. He rode off too fast for that. Well, better luck next time!" He saw her move as if to rise, and added quickly: "I'll have something else to keep me busy as soon as I can ride."

The lady relaxed.

"For instance?"

"It's my notion that Yandle must have had an accomplice."

"An accomplice?"

"He never did the job alone—that's a cinch."

"Maybe Mac Kergow—"

"Not he. No brains, that boy! No, this was somebody with as much sense as Yandle, almost. I've got an idea about it myself."

"What do you think?"

"I ain't saying; but I'm going around to some of the ranches in a few days. I want to see what new men, if any, have been hired."

"You think this fellow who helped Yandle may have got a job as a puncher?"

"That's the idea."

"That's interesting! Have you any particular ranch in mind?"

"No—I'll go to most of 'em, beginning with the Bar S, and work around to the rest from there."

"I see! I—uh—I've been on a visit north a ways."

"Mrs. Lainey said you'd ridden over to visit Mis' Shaner at the Three Bars."

"That's where I went. I came back by way of those hills over east."

"How's Pop Shaner's leg? Has he got the rheumatism out of it yet?"

"I guess not. I heard him complain his leg hurt him when he got up or sat down; but that's not what I want to tell you. Of course, what I saw may not be of any value. It may be just a coincidence. For that reason I've been hesitating to tell you. You know the forks of the Paradise Bend road above Cutter? Just off the Bend road, on the Dogville trail, I saw a man doing something to a bright bay horse."

"A bright bay, hey?"

She nodded solemnly.

"A bright bay. I could see the horse was hurt, and I swung into the Dogville trail to see if I could help him. I hadn't more than turned my horse's head when the fellow mounted and rode off like a shot. I stopped."

"A good thing, too!" Buff declared warmly. "There's no knowing what he might have done to you."

"You—you think he might have been the Twisted Foot?"

"Under the circumstances—horse a bright bay, and the way he acted—I guess he more than might. Anyway, I'm ridin' that way to-morrow."

"Oh, I'm glad I've been able to help you! I certainly hope you catch him. He rode off along the Dogville trail, remember, not the Bend trail."

"I'll remember, and I won't forget your telling me, either. Maybe I can do you a favor some day."

"That's all right," she murmured, and rose to her feet. "I guess I'd better be going. As it is, I've given the neighbors enough to talk about for the next six weeks!"

He watched her go. He saw that instead of heading toward the Starlight, she went around the hotel toward Main Street. Buff immediately entered the hotel. From one of the office windows he watched her enter the Blue Pigeon store. Nothing could have been more providential; for it had suddenly occurred to him that Lil's roan horse had not been one of those whose near forefeet he had examined after the discovery of the telltale hoofmark in the Main Street dust.

Buff hastened to his saddle for his rope. Slipping the hondoo along the fall of the rope to make his loop, he hurried to the Starlight corral. Within a minute and a half after entering the inclosure he came out, bringing with him the long-sought evi-

dence. Lil Fernie's roan horse had a most decided break in the outside wall of the quarter of the near fore hoof.

## XXXV

RAINBOW looked at Buff Warren with frank hostility.

"I don't want to talk to you! You're a deceiver!"

"What? Oh, that! You're mistaken, Rainbow—honest you are."

"Mistaken! I saw you sitting on the wagon body cheek by jowl with the hussy! Cheek by jowl!"

It was evident that she liked the latter phrase, for she repeated it three times.

"Listen, now, Rainbow—be reasonable! I couldn't help sitting there with her. She came over, I keep telling you!"

"Pursued you, I suppose! Your fatal beauty! Blah, you mush face! Be reasonable? How dare you ask me to be reasonable when I saw you myself? Cheek by jowl!"

He flapped helpless hands at her.

"Be reason—I mean, have some sense."

"I'll do something to you in about two seconds, you double-hearted flirt! And you with the finest girl ever drew breath! Wait till I tell Gilian!"

"Go ahead! Gilian doesn't care a thing about me."

"I suppose she's found out about this other—uh—person."

"No, she hasn't. She—"

"So you've managed to keep it from her until now, have you?"

"You don't understand it, Rainbow. Things are not what they seem. Sitting there with Lil may have looked funny—"

"I didn't see anything humorous in the situation," she interrupted coldly.

"Queer, then! Lemme finish," he implored. "This is serious."

"It will be—for you. You just—"

"I want you to watch Lil Fernie and let me know when she leaves town, and which way she goes."

This novel request intrigued Rainbow. She stared.

"Why?" she asked.

"Too long a story to tell you now. I don't want Lil to see us together. You will know all about it later. One thing—if you do as I ask, you'll be helping the Fairs."

"I will?"

"Cross my heart."

"It sounds almighty queer," she said,



her black eyes drawn down to the size of pin points; "but I'll do it. Where are you going to be from now on?"

"I'll stay right in town until I hear from you."

Rainbow glided away.

Buff, in his pocket the piece of trousering for which he had traded Lainey's pork chop, strolled to Calloway's store by a devious route. It would never do to permit Lil Fernie, should she be moved to watch him even as she was being watched by Rainbow, to acquire the impression that his rambling about town had a definite purpose.

The store was empty of customers, and Calloway was eating a handful of dried prunes, when Buff entered. The storekeeper's gaze was not cordial. Nothing abashed, Buff reached into the open prune box and helped himself.

"Nice sample!" he observed, when he had swallowed a couple of the prunes. "Some day, when I'm rich, Cal, I'll give you an order for a whole case."

Cal was understood to grunt.

"Liver out of order?" Buff asked with ready sympathy. "Try Pippin's Pale Pills for Purple People. Besides making the little ol' liver stand up and turn handsprings, they're warranted to cure the heaves, bog spavin, dropsy, rickets, saddle galls, colic, and distemper. Try a box—only two bits at any drug store."

Cal uttered another grunt.

"In about a minute," said Buff in a sorrowful tone, "I'll begin to think I ain't wanted."

"You don't have to wait the minute."

"Cal, you break my heart, but I won't hold it against you. You don't mean it. My own generous Cal could never be so harsh."

"What do you want?" demanded Cal, badgered to bursting.

"Me? Oh, nothing," replied Buff, helping himself to some sweet crackers. "These are real *good*," he added in pleased amazement.

"Hey, you keep out of my stock!" exclaimed Cal in high dudgeon.

He made as if to place the cover on the box, but Buff hooked an arm around his elbow and spun him about.

"I would a word with you, Callie, old settler. Sit down, do. Here's a chair. Down, Fido!"

Fido yearned for Buff's blood with a mad, mad yearning; but Buff had handled

him before, and the memory of the incident was still vivid. He sat and glared.

Buff leaned toward him confidentially.

"How's business?"

"Huh?"

"Seriously, Callie—I mean it. How's business?"

"I was doing all right till you came in."

"Sure you were! Tell little brother what you've sold to-day."

"None of your—"

"Now, now! Don't say something we'll both be sorry for. Let's have the complete list—that's an obligin' fellah."

The obliging fellow complied with an ill grace.

"You haven't mentioned clothing," said Buff, when the storekeeper fell silent.

"I didn't sell any."

"Not even a pair of pants or a shirt? Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. I ought to know, oughtn't I?"

"You ought. I'm sorry I had to take up so much of your valuable time. I'll be saying so long now."

He departed, thrusting, as he passed by, a generous hand into the prune box. From Calloway's he went to the Blue Pigeon, the emporium presided over by his good friends Joy Blythe and Mike Flynn.

At the Blue Pigeon he did not employ the tactics he had pursued at Calloway's. He waited until a customer had completed her purchases and gone out before approaching the counter.

"Mike," said he, "have you sold any pants or overalls to-day?"

"No overalls, but I sold four pairs of pants this morning."

"Four? Who bought 'em, Mike? I ain't asking out of curiosity."

"I didn't think you were, Buff. Bill Lainey bought a pair. I have to order 'em special for him, account of his size. Piney Jackson bought a pair, Judge Dolan a pair, and Lil Fernie a pair."

"Lil Fernie! What does she want with a pair of pants?"

"Got 'em for her bartender, she said. He was too busy to come over."

"Simon, hey? What does he want with more'n one pair of pants?"

"Dunno; but it ain't Simon. It's a brand-new man she's hired. Simon, he quit after that run-in you and him had."

"I see!" said Buff, and went to the Starlight Saloon.

The place was closed.

Buff sat down to await the coming of the stage. When it arrived, there was a letter for Bill Holliday. Buff opened it without hesitation. In the swinging loops of a telegraph operator's handwriting it ran:

DEAR FRIEND BILL:

The sheriff telegraphed that Sam Caltrop is not in Piegan City at present, and has not been there for at least four years. You know where I live. There's a bottle in the safe.

It was signed by the station agent at Blossom.

"And that's that!" muttered Buff, tucking away the letter.

He ate his supper at the hotel, tried the Starlight again, and found the bartender opening up. Buff looked at the man's trousers. They were not new.

"I tried to get a drink here late this afternoon," said Buff.

"Mis' Fernie gimme the day off to go fishing. I started at half past two this morning," replied the bartender. "Just got back."

"Any luck?"

"Finest mess of trout you ever saw!" exclaimed the bartender, with all the emphasis of an enthusiast. "The cook at the Canton is cleaning 'em now. One was a three-pounder, and I got four twos."

In order to be wholly in the picture, Buff bought a drink before going to the Canton. The smell of fish was heavy in the evening air when he reached the restaurant. On the ground, in the rear of the kitchen, several cats were holding high revel on the fish heads scattered about.

From within came the smell of frying trout. Buff entered and briefly questioned the cook.

He came out to find Bill Holliday riding up Main Street in the twilight. At the hotel corral Buff sought out his cousin. Bill's language was unrestrained. Buff gathered that Lil Fernie had contrived to conceal her trail, while as to the whereabouts of the red mud Bill's ignorance was as profound as Buff's.

Buff handed him the station agent's letter.

"Deeper and deeper!" was Bill's comment on the missive.

"Here's something deeper still," said Buff.

Bill listened in silence to the tale his cousin told. When Buff made an end, Bill grinned sourly. "Clever little trick, that

Lil lady! Came over to pump you, and got pumped herself. But look here—how do you know it wasn't the bartender himself tried to hop you last night? He could have caught those fish later."

"It wasn't him. The boy who tried to get in my room was bit good and plenty by Piney's dog. There was blood on that piece of cloth I got from the dog. The barkeep wasn't bit. I bumped into him on purpose, and he never flinched a mite. No, sir! Lil, she got that bartender off for the day, so's he wouldn't be in his room and hear anything when that other fellah came past the hind end of the Starlight with the ladder. With no houses, only a corral between, it looked a pure quill cinch. That's the way of it, Bill!"

Bill made Buff a little bow.

"I take off the ol' hat to you. You sure have thought things out! Telling Lil about wounding a bright bay horse, instead of a black one, was real brilliant."

"I think so myself," Buff assented demurely. "Now I'm betting Lil will do one of three things. She'll either go straight to where the Twisted Foot is lying wounded, or, if she's suspicious of me still, she'll likely follow me a ways first, so's to make sure I'm going north, like I told her."

"That's only two things. What's the other?"

"She'll maybe send the fellah who was chawed by the dog to the Twisted Foot, if he can ride. If—he—can—ride," Buff repeated, making an appreciable pause between the words, and regarding his relative with eyes brightened by the light of a sudden idea.

"We ought to search Lil's house and see who she's hidin' out," suggested Bill. "We can easy get a search warrant."

"And give the whole game away? Not on your life! I got a hunch. Come along, Bill—we'll go see Piney Jackson."

Twenty minutes later, in the darkness behind Piney Jackson's blacksmith shop, a buffalo gun roared once. Three minutes after the shot Piney hurriedly entered the Starlight Saloon.

"Gimme a drink," he said to the bartender. "I need it."

"How's that?" queried the bartender, making haste with the moral support.

"My dog," said Piney, pouring out a stiff three fingers, "he went mad. I had to shoot him. Come near biting me, too."

"Yeah? Say, you were lucky!"

"You bet! You ain't heard of him biting anybody in town, have you? He's been refusing water for the last two days, and yesterday evening he took to slavering and drooling, but I didn't pay no attention till to-night, when he took to snapping at a wagon tire. I came to life then, and got the ol' Sharps. I wasn't takin' chances with my six-shooter—no, sir! And you bet I'll wait for daylight before I go near him to bury him!"

"Bury him? Why don't you just drag him out in the brush?"

"It's easy to see you don't know a thing about mad dogs," declared Piney, with lofty superiority. "If any other dogs get to sniffing around where he lays—or coyotes, even—and get any of that slaver, they'll go mad. It's the slaver does it. Only a drop—that's all, and you begin to go all stiff, and your jaws lock, and your eyes roll backward, and you die in the most jo-awful pain a feller ever went through!"

"Ain't there any cure?" asked another customer. "I heard a doctor could—"

"It ain't noways certain that even a saw-bones can save a feller," said Piney. "Of course, there's a chance, but he's got to get his paws on you quick and soon, before the poison has a chance to get in its best licks. I tell you, it's lucky no one's been bit, with Doc Homer in Marysville!"

Piney had another drink and departed—to put, as he was careful to state, a packing case over his dead dog.

"Do you think she heard you, all right?" whispered Buff.

"I know she did," Piney declared. "I saw her peeking round the jamb of the side door. Tell a feller what it's all about."

"Piney, I can't. It's a long story, and Bill and I haven't a minute to lose. You'll know all about it soon. Whatever you do, don't let that dog out until I say when. Can you keep him from howling?"

"I'll see to that; but—"

"So long!"

Buff departed to meet his cousin, who was holding the two saddle horses beyond the edge of town on the road to Marysville. He found Bill without difficulty, for a young moon hung in the western sky.

"Did you see Rainbow and Mis' Lainey?" asked Buff, as he topped his mount.

"I saw them. Mis' Lainey said she wouldn't know a thing about curing hydrophobia, no matter who asked her, and Rain-

bow is hiding behind the Starlight corral right now. From where we are, we can see the light of her match."

"It 'll come pretty soon!"

"If the scheme works," fidgeted Bill. "You can't always—"

"There she goes!"

From behind the Starlight corral came the unmistakable streaking flicker of a lit match. Tense, holding their breaths, the two men listened.

"Hear that!" whispered Buff suddenly. "He's heading east over the wash. He'll ride the draw and hit the road a mile out."

Accordingly they turned their horses and trotted them out along the road. In the deep black shadow of a cluster of seven pines standing by the roadside, a mile out of town, they halted.

"He's in the draw still," murmured Buff, staring toward the shadowed mouth of a narrow draw which lay well to the east of the road and some three hundred yards to the rear.

"In about a minute," said Bill.

Less than a minute had elapsed when a horseman debouched from the draw at a fast trot, and headed toward the road. The pale moonlight did not define objects very clearly. Bill squinted his eyes.

"Looks like two horses."

"Led horse," said Buff shortly, as he shook out his rope.

The horseman and his led horse came on swiftly. When the man struck the road, he began to gallop. His right arm rose and fell. He was quirting the led horse.

Buff, as his prey thundered down upon him, was not as calm within as he was without. No man is who has traveled the wilderness road and suddenly sees his journey's end; and for Buff this was the end of a long trail, or at least the beginning of the end. Just beyond lay the promised land.

The rider was not more than twenty yards away. Buff drew back his right arm, held it steady for a moment, and then deftly pitched the rope in a sidewise sweep. Fair and true the loop settled over the man's shoulders. Buff's pony braced himself. Followed then a wrench, and a thud, and a cloud of dust. Two horses were galloping over the flat, and a man lay flat on his back in the center of the road.

"Better round up those two horses, Bill," suggested Buff. "We don't want 'em going back to the corral and making folks ask questions."



Bill shot off after the loose horses. Buff dismounted, and, while the intelligent Buster held the rope taut, he went hand over hand to the bundle wriggling there in a patch of moonlight.

The victim lay on his face, writhing and grunting like a pig. It was evident that the breath had been driven from his body. Buff turned him over with his toe, and viewed the man's face.

He uttered a low whistle.

"This is the second time I've had to lay a rope on you, Andy!" he said aloud. "Breathe hearty!"

He knelt beside Andy Tresawna, and removed the gambler's lethal weapons. Then he sat back on a heel, to await Andy's pleasure in the matter of taking an interest in something besides his wheezing lungs.

By the time Bill returned with the horses Andy had his breath back, and was staring with a stricken face at Buff.

"Buff, Buff!" he panted, hitching himself along the ground toward the deputy, the ropes still around his shoulders. "Buff, lemme go! Lemme go! You—you got to lemme go! I—I'm dyin', Buff! I got to go to a doctor!"

"Is that so?" remarked Buff. "What makes you think you're dying?"

"I know I'm dyin'! Pup—Piney's dog went mad and bit me!"

"You shouldn't have teased him," Buff said reprovingly. "Piney don't like it, either."

"I'm dyin'!" whined Tresawna, groveling abjectly at Buff's feet. "If I don't get to a doctor, I'll go mad!"

"I expect you will, if Piney's dog bit you," assented Buff. "He was sure in an awful state before Piney shot him. Lordy, I'm sorry for you, Andy; but it's providential, you turning up thisaway. Get on your feet, and we'll go back to jail right away."

At this Tresawna howled and clasped Buff's knees.

"Oh, Buff, lemme go! Lemme go! Please, please lemme go! I'll come back again! Or you come with me! That's it—you come with me—you and Bill! Then you can watch me, and bring me back after Doc Homer gets me out of this fix. I don't want to die of hydrophobia, Buff!"

"It 'll be tough on you, all right," said Buff, with ready sympathy.

"Oh, Buff, you wouldn't make me stay here! You don't mean that! Say you

don't mean it! I never done you no harm! I never meant to, anyway. I was druv to it. They made me. I'd be all right if it wasn't for them. Buff, you don't want me to go mad and die right here! You ain't got the heart! I know you haven't! Oh, my God, the pains are beginning now! I can feel 'em in my legs!"

"That's cramps," declared Buff, hardening his heart in the knowledge that this babbling wretch had twice sought to assassinate him. "You won't begin to really suffer from the bite for several hours yet. The poison has to have so much time to work first. Come on, if you're ready, Andy!"

It was then that Andy frankly burst into tears. Between blubberings he called upon his Maker for aid, since man was so hard-hearted.

Man continued to be callous.

"You spoke of 'them' a while back," observed Buff. "Who are 'them'? Why did you go wrong? Let's have the story of your life, Andy."

Even then, in his desperate extremity, Andy hesitated. He lifted a tear-stained face and stared wildly at Buff.

"I—I can't tell you!" he cried in a strangled voice.

"Well, that's all right. I didn't expect you to. I ain't holdin' it against you, Andy. Bill and I will stay with you till the last rattle. We'll go back to the jail now, so's we can put you in your old cell, where you'll have plenty of room to wrastle around all you've a mind to. While you're enjoying yourself that way, Andy, just you think how you could have avoided trouble by telling us what we want to know. A hydrophobia death is sure the activest way to die there is; and hurt! They tell me your heels come right around and kick you in the back of the head."

"Think of that!" Bill interjected.

Andy was obviously thinking of that, for he shuddered. Suddenly his lamentations checked on a strangled sob.

"I know something you want to know," he hiccuped.

"You know several things we want to know."

The prisoner had sunk into what was apparently an attitude of the most abandoned despair; but even as Buff put a period to his remark, Andy uncoiled with the speed of a rattlesnake, and, with a glittering something in his right hand, hurled him-

self straight at the nearer of his two captors—in this case, the bold Bill. The latter dodged with agility, tripped over his own spurs, and fell on his elbows. Tresawna measured his length on the ground, and Buff sprang on him at once.

"Gimme that knife!" he rasped. "Gimme that—"

He turned Tresawna over on his back, stared, stared again more closely, then sat back on his heels.

"Here's a calamity—Andy's dead!"

"What? You're fooling!" Thus Bill, scrambling up for a look.

"I ain't fooling. See for yourself. He fell on his own knife."

"Plumb through the heart!" elaborated Bill, withdrawing the knife in question. "If that ain't luck!"

"Why didn't you grab him, you butter-fingered numskull?" demanded Buff, furious at the miscarriage of his plans. "You were closer to him than I was."

"I didn't notice you doing any tall reaching out about that time," flung back Bill. "Anyway, it's your own fault. You're the fellah searched him. You ain't got any reason to complain. I fell on both my funny bones."

"I'm glad there's something funny in to-night's business," snarled Buff. "Crawl your horse, Bill. We'll go see Lil. What? Oh, he'll be all right till we get a chance to send out for him."

### XXXVI

HALFWAY to town a figure on foot padded out of the darkness and made Buff's mount shy with some violence.

"If I couldn't manage my horse any better than that, I'd walk," jeered Rainbow's voice. "I'll scramble up back of you, Buff." Which she did with her customary nimbleness. "Mind if I put my arms around your waist, Buffy? I won't tell Gilian."

Bill chuckled.

"All right!" grunted Buff ungraciously. "I can stand it, if you can. What did you come out here for, anyway? Why ain't you there at the corral? Suppose Lil—"

"If that isn't just like a man! Always finding fault! Heaven only knows what we women have to suffer! Here I am running my legs off to tell you something, and—"

"Hey? What—"

"Keep your head to the front, dummy!"

Another crack like that one, and my valuable nose will never be the same again. I came out to tell you that Lil Fernie is preparing to leave the neighborhood."

"How do you know?" demanded Buff, spurring Buster into a stiffer trot.

"Because she came out and saddled that roan of hers."

Buff immediately pulled up.

"Get down, Rainbow," he said quietly. "She must be miles away by now. Bill and I will have to gallop."

But Rainbow only clung the tighter.

"Go on!" she directed, heeling Buster with vigor. "Lil isn't very far away from the Starlight. You see, when you changed your plans and left town, and after I saw Andy Tresawna and Lil come out of her place together, I knew I'd have to do something to hold Lil in case she started to leave. She did, soon after she sent Andy off; so when she had her roan all saddled, and turned to open the corral gate, I was waiting there in the shadow. I threw my twisted handkerchief around her neck and tripped her, all in one motion. Oh, Lil will stay put till you come! I tied her with her own rope."

"Now that's what I call using your head," was Bill's compliment.

Buff likewise rose to the occasion.

"I take off the hat, Rainbow," said he. "I bow three times. You're a wonder!"

"I've always known that," she declared modestly, and jabbed him in the ribs with a stiffened thumb. "Get along! I want to see the end of this."

"Not so fast," said Buff. "I want to ask you a question."

They found in the Starlight corral a bound form that was throwing itself about and rolling to and fro. They carried it into the sitting room of the Starlight's owner, and lit the lamp.

Propped in a chair set squarely in front of the middle blanket of the three large Navahoes covering the end wall, and rendered helpless by the rope that bound her, Lil Fernie glared at them above the handkerchief that gagged her mouth. It was not at all to Buff's taste to be forced to treat a woman in such a manner, but he encouraged himself with the thought that Lil had undoubtedly brought it on herself.

"I want to talk to you, Lil," was his opening gun. "We've found out that—"

At which Lil keeled over sideways and fell

out of the chair. Buff caught her before her head touched the floor, and eased her down.

"She's fainted," he said, loosening the gag. "Get some water, Bill!"

But it was Rainbow who brought the water.

"I wouldn't untie her, Buff," she cautioned. "She's a snake, this lady. I don't believe she's really fainted."

"Yes, she has," contradicted Buff, dribbling water over Lil's forehead. "Look at her!"

"Probably listening to every word we say," Rainbow declared viciously. "You take my advice, and keep a rope on her."

"Oh, I guess it ain't necessary," said the tender-hearted Buff, for whom the sight of the bound and falling woman had been too much. "We don't want to hurt her."

"Of course she never wanted to hurt you—or Gillian!"

"I know, but—feeling better, Lil?"

Lil regarded him through half closed eyes.

"That rope hurt. I guess I can sit up."

Buff helped her into a chair. She sat diagonally, clinging to the back of the seat, as if all her strength had gone from her.

"Lil," said Buff, "pay attention to me. Help us out, and we'll help you out at the trial. Where is the Twisted Foot?"

Lil shook her head.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'll begin at the beginning," Buff told her with dry patience.

"Tie her up again first," implored Rainbow. "She's all right now. Do you want her to escape?"

"She can't escape," denied Buff, "with you there by that door, me here by this one, and Bill in front of the window. I don't want to hurt her, Rainbow."

"It's a pity about her, the poor thing!" sneered the unsympathetic Rainbow. "If anything happens, don't say I didn't warn you!"

"Not I," said Buff. "Lil, what day did you meet the Twisted Foot on the bank of Packsaddle Creek?"

"I never met him on any day anywhere," she contradicted sharply.

"Yes, you did," he insisted, and told her the correct date. "I found your tracks—yours and his and that roan horse's. The horse has a break in the outside wall of the quarter of the near fore, so identification

was easy. Also I found this—one of your handkerchiefs—balled up next the log you were sitting on."

Mrs. Fernie regarded the handkerchief impassively.

"Not mine!"

"No? Well, then, I'll go on with it. You and Andy Tresawna and the Twisted Foot are three of a kind. The way I've worked it out, you get the news of who's carrying large amounts of money from the talk you hear in the saloon. This news you give Andy, who passes it on to the Twisted Foot, so there won't ever be any chance of the Twisted Foot being connected with you. When Andy ain't available, you print a note and leave it in a crack at the base of the biggest cottonwood in the grove a quarter mile back of the stage company's corral. A note you left there lately ran something like this:

"Hear that J. C. of Marysville is taking ten thousand head of steers to Paradise Bend on the 18th.

"It was signed with a figure 2—the same number that's signed to this partly burned note that I found in the sheriff's stove the morning after he was murdered."

Buff produced the fragment from an envelope that he drew from his pocket, and held it out for her inspection. She looked at it unmoved. Her nerve was excellent.

"Here's another note," continued Buff, fingering out a second piece of paper from the envelope, and placing it side by side with the first on the table. "This note is the one Bill and I found under a dead heifer's horn near the Fair ranch house. In both notes there are the same kind of crosses over the T's and the same kind of sidehill A's. The same hand printed both notes—yours, for a bet. Now what I want to know is why the Twisted Foot and you are mixed up in this business of running off the Fairs. Who hired you? Was it Caltrop? He's been the busiest against the Fairs. Was it? Well, let it go," he went on, when Lil Fernie refused to make reply. "We'll come back to it later. Where did you really go when you said you went to visit Mis' Shaner at the Three Bars? Tell a fella, Lil! You see, Bill rode out to the Three Bars, and Mis' Shaner said you hadn't been there for three months. I saw you riding in from the east, remember, after your trip; but of course the direction you came from doesn't mean anything. You'd be sure to double around a good deal.



Shucks, Lil, what's the use of actin' so mulish? What you said to me out there on the wagon body this morning couldn't have tangled you any deeper if you'd made a plain confession. Now, where did you go, Lil, after finding out from Mis' Lainey all she would tell you about how to cure gunshot wounds? How badly is the Twisted Foot shot?"

Lil Fernie looked at Buff with an expression of utter boredom.

"You make me tired. Anybody would think I was mixed up with this bandit, to hear you talk."

"And any one would think you might have been hiding somebody in your house when you refused to let 'em bring Jack Cobway's body in here account of house cleaning—especially if a fellah knew you'd cleaned house the week before. Did Andy help you clean house, Lil? Don't feel like answering? All right! Well, then, after you came back from visiting—er—the Twisted Foot, we'll say, what do you do right away? You give your new barkeep permission to go fishing, so's to get him out of the way early in the morning, when Andy Tresawna slides by the Starlight with the ladder he's lifted from out back of Piney Jackson's blacksmith shop. Yeah, you don't want anybody to see friend Andy, either before or after he gets into my room and cashes me in. It was a right clever scheme, only you forgot to reckon on Piney's dog biting Andy in the pants—yeah, Piney's dog that went mad. Andy had been hiding right here, hadn't he? You bought Andy a new pair of pants at the Blue Pigeon, and when you heard about Piney's dog being mad, you told Andy, and off he went with a led horse. We met Andy outside of town. In a fracas with Bill, here, Andy fell on his own knife and—"

A suppressed shriek from Lil.

"What?" she cried, gripping the back of her chair and sitting up with a jerk.

"He's dead," said Bill. "Here's the knife, Lil. There's no mistake about it."

Lil stared at the knife as a fascinated bird stares at a snake. Slowly she turned to face Buff.

"You're trying to scare me. You'll find I won't scare for a nickel!"

It was just then that Lil Fernie, with a lightninglike movement of her leg, kicked over the table, brought the lamp crashing to the floor, and plunged the room into total darkness.

Instantly there ensued much noise and more confusion. Buff flung himself toward the spot where Lil had been. His clutching hands touched nothing save an overturned chair.

A match flared. The darkened room sprang into light. Buff smothered a curse in his throat. There was no one in that sitting room save Rainbow and Bill.

"She didn't pass my door," whispered Rainbow.

"Nor this window," declared Bill.

Buff knew that she had not gone out by way of the door that he was guarding; yet she was not in the room. He retrieved the lamp, which, although the chimney was smashed, was itself unbroken. Lighting it, he thrust its smoking flame here and there, beneath the table, under the sofa, behind chairs. His heart was sick at this second mischance; but for the life of him his hurrying brain could not guess how the woman had escaped. Involuntarily he gazed up at the ceiling. She had not gone that way, certainly.

While Rainbow and Bill were striking matches and peering helplessly under the couch for the second time, he laid his hand on the center one of the three Navaho blankets that completely covered the wall at one end of the room.

Some one rapped smartly on the panels of the door.

"What's the matter?"

The voice of the bartender on the other side of the locked door was peremptory. Buff paused, at a loss for once. He did not want the bartender in on this. It was Rainbow who saved the day.

"Nothing!" she cried in an excellent imitation of Lil's voice and accent. "Can't I knock a chair over without having you come bouncing out here bellowing like a sick calf? Who's tending bar, hey?"

The bartender retreated, muttering.

Buff lifted the blanket whose edge he was holding, and saw a narrow doorless doorway. Then, too late, he recalled that on the one and only previous occasion when he had been in this room with Lil, she had made use of that doorway; and he had forgotten it!

Be sure he was human enough to resolve to say nothing to the others of his crass negligence. He pushed through the doorway, Rainbow and Bill at his heels, and found himself in what was apparently a storeroom. He crossed the floor and pulled

wide a door that stood ajar. The smoky lamplight shone palely on a passageway, at the end of which was a closed door. By its location it must give on the back premises.

Along the corridor the three hurried. Buff lifted the latch and opened the door. Instantly a gust of wind blew out the light.

For a moment they were blinded by the sudden transition to the darkness of the night. Then they saw the stars and the dim outline of the corral stockade.

## XXXVII

ONCE upon a time a gentleman named Condo built a ranch house on the bank of the Lazy. Assisted by a straight-shooting deputy sheriff, Condo had long since gone the way of all flesh. The house, a sturdy, well constructed building, remained. No one claimed it, because the range in its vicinity had deteriorated. As it stood well away from the routes of riders passing between the various ranches, its existence was well-nigh forgotten by all except a few whose memories were of the more retentive sort.

Mr. Samuel Caltrop was one of these few. For his purposes the house was the very thing.

At the moment he was sitting at a table in the kitchen of the house, playing solitaire one-handed. Sam's left arm was in a sling. Whenever he touched the edge of the table with the slung arm, he swore.

The lamp began to smoke. He laid down his cards, lowered the wick, then rose to his feet and limped across the room to a water bucket. He lifted the dipper and drank. He set the dipper afloat and went back to his game.

He had not turned more than three cards when from the direction of the river came a sudden splash, splash, splash.

In an instant Sam was up, a six-shooter in his hand, his face over the lamp, his mouth puckered to blow it out. Above the noise of the splashing, a whistle sounded shrilly thin. An interval, then it sounded thrice again.

Sam put away his six-shooter and sat down. A horse trotted up to the open kitchen door and halted. The rider dismounted, and, after several seconds' delay, punctuated by the *thre-e-ep* of drawn saddle strings, entered the house.

"You're late, Lil," grumbled Caltrop.

"I'm lucky to get here at all," replied

Lil, sliding into a corner the sack she was carrying, and sinking wearily down on an ancient chair. "I had to get Andy off, and—"

"Get Andy off! What do you mean?"

"I mean Andy bungled the job. I swear he's growing more and more careless every time! It doesn't seem as if he can be my brother. He—"

"Tell it, tell it!"

"I am. Lemme alone, will you? I managed to keep him hidden, all right, when he came back after leaving Bushong and Piper and Kergow to go on south and run into their necktie party."

"Hey?"

"I guess it's true. Everybody in town is talking about how they were caught by Cap'n Burr and the Riley outfit, and stretched proper."

"Serve 'em right! A clumsy set of fools, that bunch! How about Chavez? You didn't mention him."

"Andy persuaded him to come back with him—part way. Yes, and you haven't a word to say about it! After Chavez pulled a knife on me there in my own saloon, I didn't insist on him being rubbed out, when you said how necessary he was to your plans; but when he wasn't necessary any longer, did you think I'd let him go without paying up? You don't know me! Hilario won't pull a knife on me or anybody else again." She laughed harshly. "He never knew what hit him."

"You're a vindictive little devil! But that wasn't the job Andy bungled, was it?"

"No—putting the kibosh on Buff Warren was the piece of work Andy slipped up on. Piney Jackson's dog bit Andy when he started to climb the ladder to Buff's window. Later it turned out the dog was mad, and that scared Andy into fits. Doc was at Marysville, so nothing would do but Andy had to go tearing off to Marysville to see him. Outside of town he was caught by Buff and Bill Holliday, and I guess they killed him."

"They killed Andy?"

"They showed me his knife, and it was all over blood. Wait—I'm not through yet. After Andy skedaddled, I was sliding out myself when three men jumped me and tied me and gagged me in my own corral, and left me there till—"

"Who were the three men?"

"I don't know, but there were three of 'em, all right. I'd been lying there awhile,

and along came Buff and Bill and that half-breed Rainbow Fernald, and took me into my sitting room. Rainbow wanted to keep me tied up, but Buff—the soft-hearted fool!—wouldn't hear of it. He set me on a chair right in front of the doorway that's hidden by the Navaho rug. I thought he must have noticed that doorway when I went through it the time I had him in there."

Sam chuckled.

"I guess he didn't notice it, if he put you right in front of it, untied. What did you do—kick over the lamp?"

"And the table, too. My horse was still in the corral, so I didn't have any trouble there. Hey? I don't think so. I waited outside of town a few minutes, but I didn't hear a sound. Once I got clear away, they couldn't follow my trail in the dark. We're safe for a while."

"A while ain't forever."

"You bet it ain't, with that cock-eyed yap of a Buff Warren raring around on his two legs! Damn his soul! I'd like to—"

"I remember a time when you wanted to marry him."

"Don't rub it in! A woman isn't always sensible. I know which side my bread's buttered on now."

"I believe you're still sweet on Buff," Caltrop declared shrewdly.

"I am not! I was once, I'll admit. I'd have married him if—"

"A good thing you didn't!" the man was quick to sneer. "Buff Warren's got too many morals to suit our game. He'd have blown on us, sure pop."

"Never think it!" flamed the woman. "I won over my husband, didn't I? And you know what he was like. Oh, after I marry a man, I can twist him around my little finger, and you can stick a pin in that!"

"All right, all right! No call to get het."

"Well, you make me hot. You—oh, what's the use? How's the arm and leg?"

"They're coming along slow and sure."

"If it hadn't been for the information I got from Lainey's wife, they'd be slower and not so sure, by a jugful."

"I know that; but I don't understand how it happened. I must be hoodooed. I never missed making a center shot at short range until that last fracas I had with Buff. I couldn't drop him to save my life. I tell you, when that last shot of his went

through my leg, I thought I was a goner, sure. I don't know how I ever got on my horse after falling down the way I did. Our luck seems to be out. Hell's bells, it's sure tough their mixing you up with Andy thisaway!"

"It's tougher their mixing me up with you!"

"What? They haven't—"

"Not with you personally. They don't suspect Mr. Samuel Caltrop of the Eighty-Eight at all. They've tangled me with the Twisted Foot good and tight, but they don't know the Twisted Foot is you."

"That's a blessing! For a second I thought—look here, what else do you know?"

"Plenty. You don't know half of it."

She went on to tell him all that Buff had told her in the sitting room at the Starlight; but of her morning conversation with the deputy, wherein she had been so thoroughly befooled, she was careful to say not a word.

"That's bad!" was Caltrop's casual comment, at the conclusion of the narrative. "It puts a period to our organization. Damn it all, I should have married you instead of your sister! If we'd been living together, all these mistakes wouldn't have happened."

"Wouldn't they? You don't know. You'd probably have left my note in the sheriff's stove, for Buff to find, whether we'd been living together or not. Bright, that was! Of all the born fool plays, that takes the cake! Marry you? Thank God, I never liked you enough! But Mame didn't have my luck. She loved you from the first. She loves you yet. You have no kick coming with Mame. She's been a good wife. You don't want to forget that it was through her you met Andy and me. She's more than done her share, and small credit you ever gave her!"

"You talk as if she did it all! How about me having to play two parts? I, the Twisted Foot, not afraid of man, woman, or child, had to play Sam Caltrop, who was never looking for trouble, and who, in order to keep in character, let Yandle, the sheriff, or anybody else, bawl him out whenever they felt like it. The only time I ever slipped was when Yandle rode me, there in Joe's office. I'd have done for him then and there, if I hadn't remembered in time."

"Oh, you're a wonder, you are! You've forgotten how Mame begged you to take



Yandle's advice, and buy the Fairs out. If you'd done that, instead of acting stingy and stubborn, you wouldn't have stirred up all this mess. You've forgotten how Marie's instinct told her something was wrong the time you and Rum were going straight over to the Fair place, after Buff refused to run 'em off. Mame did her best to stop you, but nothing would do you but to bull ahead. If Buff hadn't happened—just happened—to mention the name of the Fairs, you'd have bulged over there just as soon as his back was turned. You've had luck—and Mame. You wouldn't have been deuce high without Mame. When you were off on jobs, she'd always have a plausible story to tell about your absence. I suppose you think it's been easy to keep fooling Rum Gordon and the boys all the time; but she did it. She never failed."

"How about the last time you were there? Did—"

"Lord, yes! The boys all think you've been called unexpectedly to Piegan City on business. You've no call to worry. I'm the one to be doing that; and I've decided to take my share and pull out for good."

"I won't. I'm going to stick. Mame likes it here, and so do I."

"How about the Fairs?"

"Don't worry about them. I'll get rid of that outfit. I haven't been able to give them all my attention yet, but from now on I'll see that they're not neglected!"

"That beard makes another man out of you," Lil said, with seeming irrelevance.

"Even so, I can't afford to take any chances of having them see me, and I ain't going to. They've had their warning, and if they haven't seen fit to drag it by the time I'm able to ride, I'll begin on the family. I suppose you put down two weeks, as I told you to?"

"Two or three—I forget which. What does it matter? Three weeks will be over before you'll be able to ride more than ten miles. And I'd advise you to be good and careful when you do start shooting them up, because the first person to be suspected will be the well known Sam Caltrop."

"I know it," admitted the man, with a bitter curse; "but I've got to risk that. Anyway, I'll play fairly safe by getting rid of Buff and Bill first."

"You'll find that a job of work!" was the woman's dry comment, as she pushed back her chair with a scrape and a shuffle. "I'm going out to unsaddle."

"Wait a shake," said Sam Caltrop. "Is Yandle still in jail?"

"Sure is."

"Are they going ahead with trying to hang it on him?"

"I guess so. His lawyer hasn't been able to get him out of jail yet."

"He mustn't get out of jail. The longer they bark on that trail, the safer I'll be. I'll see if I can't cook up enough evidence to make him an extra good case. It would be a fine joke on Pencil to have him stretched for something he didn't do! As a lawyer, he'd be able to appreciate the fun of the thing. By the way, did you bring the bacon?"

"In that sack," was the reply. "Two sides, ten pounds of coffee, and a sack of salt. That's all you wanted, wasn't it?"

"That's all. With the grub you brought, and this, I'll have plenty. What? You bet I'll move camp out in the brush tomorrow morning. It would be just like Buff Warren to ride by here. How soon are you going to quit?"

Lil uttered a hard laugh.

"I'm quitting here and now. You're getting along all right, so you won't need me any more. To-morrow night I'll go to the ranch, get my share, and drift."

"What about your saloon?"

"That can rot, for all I care. I knew this bust-up would come some day, and I've prepared for it. I've changed all my profits into hundred-dollar bills as fast as they came in. I'm carrying the roll in a belt under my waist. Fifteen thousand seven hundred—not bad, hey, for a little saloon business? With that and my share of our coin, I'll have a fine stake for a new start wherever I go!"

"I'd feel safer and—richer if you didn't go just yet."

"Not go? Why, I've got to go!"

"I think not. You've made so many mistakes, Lil, that—"

"Mistakes? Me?" she cried in sudden fury.

"Yes, you."

"For instance?"

"One of your last ones was giving out, before you came here the first time, that you were going to visit Mis' Shaner at the Three Bars. It gave those deputies a chance to check up on you—see? That one mistake is more than enough. We needn't go into the others. I'm sorry, but I find I can't afford to have you at large."

"What do you mean?"

"This!"

He fired as he spoke. The red blood gushed out over Lil Fernie's temple and cheek. For an instant she gazed at him, her expression depicting the utmost amazement; then she flung out her hands and fell face downward on the floor.

Caltrop stooped above her, his face a mask of concentrated satisfaction. She did not move. He turned her over. Her lower jaw dropped. Her eyes were wide open, staring, glazed.

He had knelt to feel her heart when Buff Warren flung himself through the doorway.

At the sound of Buff's quick footstep, Caltrop turned and fired; but his lame leg bothered him, and the shot went wide. In an instant Buff's hands were on Sam's gun wrist, and the next shot went into the floor. Before he could fire again the gun was torn from his grasp by Bill Holliday, who had scrambled into the room by way of the window.

"I guess he'll do, for just now," said Buff grimly, getting to his feet.

He dragged Sam upright, thereby eliciting from the man a sharp grunt of pain.

"Go easy!" implored Sam. "Go easy!"

"You weren't easy with Lil, you dirty rat! You ought to be lynched! What did you kill her for, anyway?"

Sam's reply was such that Buff lost his temper and shook him till his teeth rattled.

"Shut your filthy mouth!" ordered Buff. "She's dead—let it go at that!"

"She led you here!" was Caltrop's passionate declaration.

"No, she didn't," contradicted Buff. "She played square by you. You ran a cold deck on her. Your specialty seems to be cold decks. Now, Caltrop, who shot you? It seems to me that I recognize my own handiwork."

"You go to hell!"

"Did you shoot Jack Cobway? Are you the Twisted Foot?"

"He is the Twisted Foot!"

The reply came from a totally unexpected quarter. The three men turned their heads as one. They saw the supposedly dead woman, her body midway between sitting and lying, leaning on the support of one arm, the other hand pointing directly at the captive.

"And that ain't all he is!" declared Lil, her voice rising shrilly. "I'll tell it all! Every single thing you've done!"

At this Buff, recovering from his astonishment, ran to her and helped her to a chair. Then he hastily washed and bandaged her wound, which, instead of being mortal, as Caltrop had intended, proved to be merely a deep graze that had stunned her temporarily.

When Buff had made her as comfortable as the limited facilities of the place permitted, she stabbed Sam Caltrop with a venomous glance, and began to talk rapidly and to the point.

### XXXVIII

JACK FAIR wolfed his food like a famished man. His mother and Gilian seemed to be incessantly traveling between the table and the stove. Jemima and the Bob twin sat on either side of him, while his father faced him across the table.

"If I were you," said Abijah Fair, his kind, sightless old face lined and drawn with the trouble that had come upon him in his old age—"if I were you, Jack, I'd pull out. We'll be all right."

Jack gulped his mouthful and shook his head.

"I don't dare pull out yet—not while you're in any danger."

"You're in more danger than we are, since—"

Jack Fair shook his head.

"That deputy man, Buff Warren, may think he's smart, but I'm smarter! If I wasn't, I'd never have been able to dodge him and the other burly boys so long. I'll bet he really thought he'd taken me in that day when I held him up and he told me to hang around here for your protection. *For your protection!* So Tobias and Holliday would have a cinch arresting me—that's why! Catch him doing it himself! He's too sweet on Gilian. Oh, no—he'd stand back and talk as mealy-mouthed as you please, like he didn't have a thing to do with it! I'm sure glad you let him know what was what, Gil!"

"Are you?"

Thus Gilian, her expression none too happy.

"You bet! It's a good thing there's somebody in this family he couldn't fool. The rest of you are blind!"

"I am—in one way," Abijah Fair gently reminded him.

Jack's face reddened.

"I didn't mean that, dad," the young man said. "I—"

"I know what you mean. You don't trust young Warren. I do. I tell you, as I've told you before, there isn't a mean bone in his body. He'd no more play the spy than I would."

"I should say not!" burst in the Bob twin. "You should have seen him take out after that rustler the day our cows was run off!"

"He's an officer of the law, and an officer of the law will do anything. Don't I know? I wasn't in the pen for nothing! I wouldn't trust a beak as far as I can throw a horse by the tail!"

"You and Gilian are a pair of young fools," declared Mrs. Fair, who, until now, had taken no part in the discussion. "Your father is right—Buff Warren is a good boy. When he told you to stay around here for our protection, he wasn't laying a trap for you. He was worried over us, and he was glad that you would be able to look after us a little."

"Of course he was," cut in Jemima. "And as for Bill—"

She stopped short, blushing to the tips of her ears.

"And as for Bill," prompted Jack. "Let's have the rest of it!"

"I don't care!" flung out Jemima. "Buff's all right. If the truth were told, Gil more'n half thinks so herself."

"I don't think so at all!" denied Gilian, with a flash of her amber eyes. "I—I hate him! I—"

"Put 'em up!"

The harsh command came from the lips of Nap Tobias. He stood in the doorway, aiming a sawed-off double-barreled Greener at Jack Fair's chest.

Jack tossed up his hands.

"What do you think of your family pet now?" was the savage sneer he flung at the three members of his family with whom he had found himself in disagreement.

Nap Tobias sat in Jack Fair's former place at the kitchen table, his plump hands clasped on the board. Opposite, in his father's chair, sat young Fair, securely handcuffed. In one corner of the kitchen the remainder of the family were gathered together under guard of two members of Nap's posse.

The Wilhemina twin was sobbing in her mother's arms; for it had transpired that she, having been posted as sentry on the stable roof, had deserted her post to go to

the spring for a drink. There she had been surprised and seized by one of the posse, who had clapped a hand over her mouth before she could give the alarm. Naturally, she blamed herself for her brother's plight, and was heartbroken in consequence.

Nap Tobias, on the other hand, appeared thoroughly pleased with himself. He filled a cup from the coffeepot at his elbow, and spaded in the sugar with the enthusiastic manner peculiar to fat men.

"Two thousand dollars you're worth to us!" he said, with an oily chuckle, stirring vigorously. "You didn't know you were so valuable, did you? Fact! It's all in the notice the Minnesota authorities sent out."

"You needn't pat yourself on the back," snarled Jack Fair, his handcuff chain clinking. "If it hadn't been for Buff Warren putting you on to me, you'd never have caught me, you fat catfish!"

"Is that so?" riposted the fat catfish, flushing to his stubbly gills. "Now that shows how much you know about it! Buff Warren doesn't know you're on the map. The sheriff got the notice, with your description and the offer of the reward, a few days before he was killed. We knew all we'd have to do was to have this place watched, and sooner or later you'd turn up. You bet we weren't telling Buff Warren and Bill Holliday about that notice, knowing how thick they were with your family! They'd have had you warned and out of the country too quick."

"I told you so!" sniffed Jemima, to her sister's address.

Gilian said nothing, but two big drops gathered at the corners of her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. Observing the tears, and misinterpreting them, Nap Tobias was moved to further ungracious sneers.

"You'll have something to cry for before long, young woman! Soon as my men have caught up your mules, I'm going to pack the whole kit and biling of you off to Farewell for committing the crime of giving comfort and aid to, and concealing of, an escaped prisoner. I guess here comes the wagon now."

Nap Tobias strode to the doorway. He stared for a moment, then stepped outside, still staring.

The noise of wheels drew steadily nearer.

"Lo, Nap!" called the cheerful voice of Buff Warren. "I never expected to see your bright Sunday face out here!"



"I'll bet you didn't," said Nap. "What—why, what you driving a wagon for?"

"You'll find out in a minute," Buff made reply.

The white-tilted wagon stopped in front of the door, and Buff climbed down over the wheel.

"Why the zoo?" he asked, waving a hand in the direction of the posse's saddle horses.

"I've just caught the escaped convict, Jack Fair," replied Nap, in a fatly complacent tone. "I've arrested the whole family, too, for hiding him out."

The chief deputy stared at his subordinate with the utmost truculence, as if to say:

"What are you going to do about it?"

For an instant Buff Warren stared back. He permitted himself a slight smile. Bill Holliday, perched on the wagon seat, openly snickered.

"What's so funny?" snapped Tobias.

"You," replied Buff. "Every day you grow funnier. Let's go inside, Nap. I want to tell you a story. Come on!"

"I haven't any time to listen to stories. I've got to—"

"You'll have plenty of time to listen to this one. Really, I must insist. Lemme take your arm, Nappy. Bill, I'll be right back."

Bill instantly uttered a loud moan of distress.

"What's the matter with Bill?" inquired Nap, at last permitting himself to be led within by the persuasive Buff. "Is he sick?"

"He wants to hear my story," Buff explained kindly. "A great hand for stories is our Bill. Take that chair, Napoleon."

"Who the hell are you to be giving me orders?" Napoleon flared up. "I'll have you know—"

Buff raised an admonitory hand.

"Now don't start behaving the way you do at home, Mr. Tobias. There are ladies present. Take that chair."

Nap, fuming, took the chair. Buff stood in the doorway, spread his legs, stuck his arms akimbo, and embraced the assemblage with his most beaming smile.

"We were just passing through," he began, "on our way to Farewell. I didn't expect to see my friend Mr. Jack Fair"—he bowed in the direction of the manacled youth—"or my other friend Mr. Napoleon Tobias"—another bow—"the eminent

man catcher of Farewell County, and his band of trained bloodhounds"—a series of bows directed in succession to the men guarding the Fairs, and toward the windows, which were now backgrounded with heads and shoulders belonging to the other members of the posse.

These individuals looked none too well pleased at being referred to as bloodhounds; yet they were not openly resentful. Many of them had witnessed the downfall of Stony Flint, and those who had not done so had heard detailed accounts.

Buff turned his head and called to Bill Holliday:

"Sling over the bran sack, will you, Bill?"

Deftly he caught the sack, untied the string that bound its mouth, and fished purposefully within. He produced a pair of boots with unusually thick soles, which he tendered to Nap Tobias.

"Look at these boots—at the right one, especially. Found 'em in Condo's old cabin. See how the soles are built? They're double, and, while the bottom sole of the left boot follows the outline of the upper sole, the bottom sole of the right boot toes out, instead of in. Only the sole toes out—see? Put your hand in, Nap, and feel how the boot toes in inside, the way any ordinary boot does. A fellow can walk in it all right without twisting his right foot in any way; but whenever he steps, his sole will leave the mark of the Twisted Foot. Here are some saddle-blanket cigarette papers, and some of that black tobacco. We found all these things in Condo's cabin—in the saddle pockets of a saddle."

There was no holding the posse. Its component parts surged into the cabin to crowd about Nap and stare and finger the boots, and stare again.

Buff leaned against the wall, and, rolling a cigarette, cast a wink at Gilian. She gave him an April smile, for her poor little chin was wabbling with emotion.

"I always said those saddleblanket papers and that black tobacco were just a blind," yapped Nap, who for once in his life was thinking quickly. "Just like these boots—meant to turn suspicion from the real man."

"How do you do it, Nap?" murmured Buff. "It must be a gift!"

"How did you find out he was at the cabin?" inquired Tobias.

"When I was laid up at the hotel, I saw Lil Fernie ride in from somewhere with red clay on her horse, but not on her; so I knew the horse had been taking a roll. I had a notion Lil had been visiting the Twisted Foot, so it was easy to put two and two together and guess that the horse had been rolling inside a corral fence. I couldn't think of any place in the Territory where red clay or earth and water came together, and neither could Bill. Not until Bill and I were riding into Farewell last night with Rainbow Fernald did I remember that she knows this Territory like a book. I asked her, and she said that water from a spring ran through one corner of Condo's corral which was more'n half red clay. That was enough for us to go on; but Rainbow deserves all the credit. If it hadn't been for her good memory, we'd have lost out entirely. We rode on into town after that, and were questioning Lil Fernie, when she got away on us and scattered off to warn the Foot. We went straight to Condo's cabin, and—"

"I wish I'd been at the cabin with you!" Nap interrupted. "I'll bet I'd have found a clew to follow—something that would point out the trail of the fellah after he left the cabin!"

"I'll just bet you would," Buff acquiesced; "but, as it happens, you jumped this fence ahead of your horse. We caught the Twisted Foot at the cabin. He'd tried to kill Lil Fernie before we got there, but he didn't succeed. When she came to, she was so mad that she snitched on him to a complete fare-you-well. He is the Twisted Foot, and he's the man who murdered the sheriff. Lord knows what he hasn't done. We've got it all written down. Lil's been helping him right along, and so has Tresawna. He's dead, though—fell on his own knife."

Every one in the cabin was viewing Buff Warren with eyes that fairly popped. Having ended his tale of wonders, he pulled strongly upon his cigarette. Nap Tobias swallowed hard, and ran plump fingers around the inside of his neckband. He asked a question of Buff.

"It was Sam Caltrop," was the reply.

"What?" The word was a screech. "You got his remainders out there in the wagon?"

Buff halted the incipient rush for the doorway by shaking his head and tossing the bran sack at Nap's feet.

"Most of the proceeds of his robberies are in that sack. Some of the pokes have the names of the banks on 'em, some of 'em the owners' names. Yeah—Jack Cobway's is there—Caltrop's last robbery. Roughly speaking, there's about two hundred thousand dollars in that sack."

Nap's eyes bulged.

"Where did you find the money?"

"At the Eighty-Eight Ranch."

Nap, pawing the sack's contents, looked up quickly.

"Was Mame in this?"

"Naturally. Besides being Sam's wife, she's own sister to Lil Fernie and Andy Tresawna, as well as to Rum Gordon."

"Own sis—where is she?"

"At the ranch. The boys are looking after both her and Lil. They won't get away."

"That's good! But I'm sure sorry you had to kill Sam. It would have been a pleasure to see him hung!"

"But we didn't kill him."

"I suppose you got him cached some'eres because you think I'll claim part of the rewards that are out for him!"

Nap's snarl was bitter.

"There, there, Nap! I know your generous soul too well for that! You'll see Sam Caltrop hung yet, so don't you fret. Wait—I ain't through yet. My story has a happy ending yet to come. We will now go back fifteen years and four States east."

Buff paused. He had the strict attention of every one in the room. His voice was harsh when he spoke again.

"Fifteen years ago Abijah Fair was convicted of murdering his brother, Thomas Fair, at Cherry Grove, Redstone County, Minnesota, and was sentenced to twenty years in Stillwater Penitentiary. At the end of ten years he was pardoned for good behavior, and because he went blind."

The posse muttered under its collective breath. It felt that Buff's rehash of the Fair murder was unnecessary and brutal. The latter consideration did not move Nap, but the former did.

"What's all this chatter for?" said he. "I know Jack Fair was convicted of the same crime. I know he escaped. Yonder he sits, and back he'll go to jail, where he belongs. That old murderer of a dad of his will go with him, along with the rest of the family!"

"That, my dear Mr. Tobias, is where you're mistaken. If I hear you call Mr.

Fair a murderer again, I shall be vexed with you, you stuffed sausage!"

Nap ignored the "stuffed sausage," but not to call Mr. Fair a murderer was an irksome restriction.

"Well," he took issue, "ain't the man a murderer?"

"Not by a jugful! He never murdered his brother Tom. He never murdered anybody; but his brother murdered somebody. After a violent quarrel with Abijah, Tom killed a tramp, and then burned the body to a crisp, so that the physical features would be unrecognizable. Near the body he left his own watch, his knife, and an empty purse that all the neighborhood knew belonged to him. He also left in the vicinity a coat belonging to his brother Abijah, and an ax belonging to his nephew, Jack Fair. Both ax and coat he had carefully stained with the blood of the tramp, before burning the body. Hoping that his brother and nephew would be convicted of murdering him, he came to this Territory, where, under two different aliases, he did the best he could for himself."

"But I don't see what—" Nap again started off.

"You will in two shakes. Fetch him in, Bill, so the folks can see him."

A clatter without, muffled curses, followed by stumblings, and then reluctantly appeared, boosted by the willing Bill, the shrinking form of Sam Caltrop. The only clean thing about Sam was a very recent shave.

Mr. Fair's voice cut across the sudden silence.

"What is it, Dora?"

Before his wife could reply, Jack Fair leaped to his feet, knocking over his chair in his haste.

"It's Uncle Tom!" he roared, dashing at the prisoner with clubbed cuffs. "Uncle Tom—the man they said we killed! Let me at him!"

"You should have told me Sam Caltrop was in the wagon at first," said Nap huffily, after he had heard Sam bleat corroboration of every fact stated by Buff Warren.

"You should have told me, instead of—" He paused.

"Instead of fooling you," supplied Buff pleasantly. "Perhaps, if you'd asked about Sam, instead of his remainders, I would have told you. I try to tell the truth—al-

ways. How about turning Jack Fair loose?"

"No—I'll have to hold him until the deal is legally settled."

"Ain't you satisfied with the trouble you're going to have over holding Yandle? When it turns out there ain't any evidence against him, and never was, Pencil will have reason to be right down put out with you, Nap. He's just the boy to sue you for false arrest and to collect damages."

"Sue me?" squealed Nap. "Why, arresting Yandle was your idea!"

"But you, as my superior officer, gave the order, so you're responsible. That is the law. As to this Jack Fair arrest, if you must play the goat, far be it from me to try to teach you sense; but he'll be out on bail as soon as I present the evidence to Judge Dolan. If you'll take my advice, you'll parole him in my custody, and make sure of all our votes when election time comes around—unless you want me to run for sheriff against you."

"Not that!" declared Nap, with frank haste, bringing forth his handcuff keys. "You're too damned bright for any human use!"

Buff, going out a few minutes later to attend to his horse, was met by Jemima.

"Buff," said Jemima, "Gil's gone up on the rise back of the stable. She feels pretty bad. She—well, he might have let me finish!"

Behind the stable, in the thin brush, Buff found Gilian. She was looking across the Lazy River at the high ground beyond the flats.

She did not turn at his approach. He halted beside her. Still she did not move. He coughed behind his hand.

"Fine view!" he observed chattily, to conceal a strange nervousness that possessed him.

She neither stirred nor spoke. Stealing a sidewise glance at her, he detected the traces of recent tears. So she had been crying, had she? On his account? He devoutly hoped so. It would make matters easier for him.

But matters were made still easier by groping fingers that brushed his wrist, and by a soft voice that murmured:

"You know those words I used when I made a fool of myself, Buff? Well, I—I ate them, every one!"